

To the Education Appropriations Committee:

I am Mary Ann Lopez, Director of Food Services in South Windsor Public Schools and Co-President of the School Nutrition Association of CT. SNACT is a non-profit organization made up of over 500 food service professionals in 94 child nutrition programs across our state and an affiliate of the School Nutrition Association, our national organization in Washington D.C.

I am here today to address the serious concerns that our food service directors face in regard to proposed Governor's budget in HB5020 sec 4 (a).

There are several issues that arise from her proposal that you need to consider when discussing the budget proposal . **HB 5020 sec 4 (a)** in essence says if a school is receiving supplementary grants from the Healthy Food Certification Program, a state regulation addressing the foods sold throughout the schools within our districts, then the district will lose their portion of the federally mandated state matching funds for the National School Lunch Programs in Connecticut.

Currently the State of CT matching reimbursement is part of a block grant established over 25 years ago at about \$2,000,000. At that time each meal served was supported with about 7 cents from this block grant. Since then our programs have grown, our student populations have increased tremendously and our reimbursement is now under a nickel per meal. For a district such as mine, it means about \$17,000 in additional income to help offset the differences between the cost of meal and the price we charge.

The Healthy Food Certification commitment by our district has been a successful opportunity for us to consistently deliver the message of healthy eating to our students throughout the school day. This standard addresses the nutritional content of all food items sold to students separately from a reimbursable school lunch or breakfast. The standards focus on decreasing fats and saturated fats, eliminating trans fats, reducing sodium and sugars, moderating portion sizes and increasing the consumption of nutrient rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy, lean meats and legumes. All schools in any district that chooses to comply with healthy food certification under Section 10-215f of the CT general statutes must follow the CT Nutrition Standards for all sources of food sales to students, including but not limited to school cafeterias, vending machines, school stores and many fund raising activities on school premises.

Are you aware that districts that participate as a Healthy Food Certification are considered to have met **Results Based Accountability** by accomplishing it's goals:

- #1. Influencing students to make healthy choices by offering them throughout the school campus and
- #2. Improving the overall health of students with a program that is efficient and low in cost.

**Connecticut Nutrition Standards and Healthy Food Certification regulation get an A+ ✓✓✓**

**There are several ways we know that this has been accomplished.**

#1. We have heard from parents that they are so pleased that their children now eat Locally Grown Farm Fresh peppers, asparagus and green beans after trying them at school. That is success in influencing healthy choices behavior.

#2. Teachers in some of our elementary schools have asked room mothers and parents to not send in cupcakes or candy for their classroom parties. The now celebrate with no food! That is successful efforts to change behaviors.

#3. A study was published in the Journal of American Dietetics, February 2010 issue called **Healthier Options for Public Schoolchildren Improves Weight and Blood Pressure in 6- to 13-Year-Olds.** The title says it all.

A January 28th letter from the National Governors Association urged Congress to **"significantly increase funding for school nutrition programs contained in child nutrition legislation in order to reduce child hunger and improve the health and nutrition of children across the nation."** Governors Bill Ritter, Jr. (D-CO) and **M. Jodi Rell (R-CT)**, Chair and Vice Chair respectively, of the NGA's Education, Early Childhood and Workforce Committee, wrote that "[b]y providing increased funding, Congress can ensure that child nutrition programs can effectively protect the health and well-being of low-income children." They noted that Congress "can incentivize and help support state and local strategies to increase overall program effectiveness and operation and take an important stride to reduce hunger and food insecurity in America, improve child nutrition and health, and enhance child development and school readiness." Governor Rell's commitment to such goals for our federal level should follow at the state level.

Some statistics that might help put this all in perspective:

School Nutrition Programs place emphasis on purchasing high quality meal and snack items that fit in with the CT Nutrition Standards. If our funding is drastically reduced by the Governor's proposal to eliminate the state matching funds, however paid, the child nutrition programs across the state will struggle to continue to purchase food items made with whole grain, fresh local and sustainable produce, and low fat, and lower sodium products. We will continue to work with fewer dollars to meet more needs of our customers.

Typically a school lunch, including fresh, local produce, in CT costs about \$4.10. That includes the costs of all labor, benefits, food and paper supplies.

Reimbursement for a typical lunch in CT includes the 4.5 cents mentioned above from state matching funds, 25 cents from federal reimbursement, and about \$.19 in government commodity subsidy. Schools that participate in the Healthy Food Certification, also receive 10 cents for that. Add to this the price charged for a meal for a paying child which on average is about \$2.25. If you have done your quick math you realize that we still have over a \$1.00 to cover per child! That's right - we do not cover our costs for the meal! District directors such as myself are struggling to maintain the commitment we have to serving our children healthy meals and snacks with the income and reimbursement we currently receive.

Our district has seen our numbers of students qualified for free and reduced meals double this year! CT overall has seen significant increases in the numbers of families applying for the subsidized meals. So our goal for the coming year is to keep our current pricing in place and do more for less. Labor and benefit costs will increase, as will the costs of food (weather plays such a part in these costs). Attempts to commit more to the locally grown and in-house made foods will be jeopardized by the resulting loss in income from a lower reimbursement from the state.

Our districts' Board of Education budgets are strained and reductions in what help the Board of Education can offer to us have resulted in little assistance for our programs – if any is offered. Districts are currently committing to the Healthy Food Certification for more than philosophical reasons. Removing the funding in essence from this program puts this commitment into jeopardy in many districts.

A recent article in our local school newspaper about the high cost of school lunch in our community was fairly balanced and talked about the costs of providing healthier meals and yet the students called for us to consider lowering the price of a meal because of the poor economy in our area. Teachers are asking us to lower the price of the items we sell a la carte since they do not want to pay the same prices they pay in the grocery store or local restaurant!

Our funding is being squeezed by too many program aspects. It has to stop if we hope to eliminate hunger in CT and provide our students a healthy future. I am here to advocate for our children since they cannot sit here before you tonight and ask you to feed them so they can grow up strong and healthy and well educated. **On behalf of the children of CT and the food services directors throughout CT, I ask you to reject this budget proposal, HB 5020 sec 4 (a). Support our Results Based Accountable Programs. Thank you for your time and attention.**

