



Testimony before the Select Committee on Children in favor of
H. B. No. 5360, AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN IN THE RECESSION
March 4, 2010

Good afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Urban and members of the Select Committee on Children. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut! a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization. I also sit on Speaker Donovan's Task Force on Children in the Recession. I am here today to speak in favor of HB 5360, An Act Concerning Children in the Recession. This is a very timely bill, and frankly, can't be enacted soon enough to create some very positive changes for the children of Connecticut.

I will be limiting my remarks to the nutrition pieces of the legislation, which are Sections 5 and 6. Overall, the three main focuses of this legislation will increase the economic stability of many families during these tough economic times: safety net and other program coordination and outreach, increasing response time for those services and maximization of federal funds in order to increase access. The federal nutrition programs are a prime example of this.

More than 14.6 percent of households in Connecticut reported not having enough money to buy food that they needed during the prior twelve months in 2009, according to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). In households with children almost 1 in 5, or 18.7%, struggled to put food on the table. Each of the five Congressional Districts in Connecticut had more than one in ten residents reporting food hardship in 2008-2009. This legislation is needed.

With the increase of income limits up to 185% of the federal poverty level, with no asset limits, we saw a huge increase in the number of people applying for, and receiving SNAP benefits. **A side benefit of this change is that SNAP eligibility is on par with the child nutrition programs which allows a better flow of eligibility and participation on all the federal food programs.** I would like to note that with this increase there is categorical eligibility to free school meals to any child whose family is receiving SNAP benefits – increasing the need for ongoing coordination between DSS and SDE.

Increasing participation in the federal food programs, specifically the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP (formally food stamps), School Breakfast, Summer Feeding, After Schools Snacks and Suppers, and Special Supplemental Food Program for Woman Infants and Children, also known as WIC will not only increase food security for many families, it will bring needed monies into the state. **EHC! calculates that Connecticut will receive over \$8.4 million if we met the national average on just the school breakfast and summer feeding alone.** This legislation gives communities the tools to get to those averages.

During the 2006 Connecticut legislative session \$100,000 was added to the school breakfast line item, \$50,000 of which went towards pilot grants for in-classroom breakfast. These grants made a tremendous and contagious impact on breakfast participation in the communities that took advantage of the program. The grants, awarded to schools in New Britain, Stratford, and Bridgeport, were extremely successful in upwards of tripling the number of children eating breakfast each day. This pilot project started with three schools and a year later expanded to include 17 schools within these three school districts.

This legislation would increase outreach to schools to offer “after the school bell” breakfasts. Bringing breakfast into the classroom, or making it part of the school day, encourages participation and eliminates the timing barrier often associated with breakfast programs who serve before the bell, making it hard and sometimes impossible for students to participate. The other major barrier is the stigma attached to those children receiving free and reduced price breakfast; this is eliminated with “universal” or free for all breakfast.

After one year, New Britain increased the reach of their breakfast program, and made it free for all students. You can see from the table below that the district did not lose any funds – infact they doubled the money coming in! AND, most importantly, more children got a breakfast – that helps them be better students.

New Britain Public Schools

Meal and Cost Comparison - Pre and Post In Classroom Breakfast

Pre In Class Breakfast

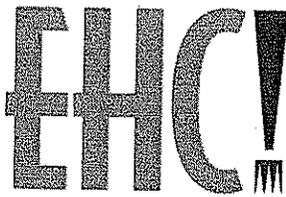
Meals By Category	Total Meals	Reimbursement Rate	Total \$	Cash Income	Grand Total
Free	26,005	\$1.61	\$41,868.05	\$0.00	\$41,868.05
Reduced	1,997	\$1.31	\$2,616.07	\$0.30	\$3,215.17
Paid	4,380	\$0.24	\$1,051.20	\$0.50	\$3,241.20
Totals Per Month	32,382		\$45,535		\$48,324

Post In Classroom Breakfast

2008

Meals By Category	Total Meals	Reimbursement Rate	Total \$	Cash Income	Grand Total
Free	53,452	\$1.61	\$86,057.72	\$0.00	\$86,057.72
Reduced	2,596	\$1.31	\$3,400.76	\$0.00	\$3,400.76
Paid	5,475	\$0.24	\$1,314.00	\$0.00	\$1,314.00
Totals Per Month	61,523		\$90,772		\$90,772

The Summer Feeding Program feeds children when school is out. Only about 25% of those children who eat a free and reduced school meal receive food in the summer. One of the reasons our participation is so low can be partly attributed to lack of awareness on behalf of providers and families. HB 5360 proposes forming a child nutrition outreach program within



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Making Room at the Table

the State Department of Education to conduct program outreach for the federal School Breakfast Program, Summer Nutrition Programs, and Child and Adult Care Food Program (which includes matching after school programs with after school snacks and a soon to be implemented supper program).

Summer Food increased significantly through community outreach and small Operation Participation grants (sponsored by EHC!): Bridgeport: 57% increase (from 197,000 to 310,000 meals served), Middletown, 33% increase (17,500 to 23,000 served), and Hartford saw an increase from 150,000 meals to 200,000. For 9 months a collaborative, organized by EHC!, met to work on increasing the Summer Food sites and accessibility in north eastern CT, a rural and very low-income section of the state, using outreach and public education. The work had a positive

outcome - an increase of over 500 meals served per day – a 74% increase. Outreach works to feed children when they may go without.

The federal Child and Adult Care Food Program funds after-school snacks and, soon to be implemented suppers for at-risk children in the state. **We would ask that in Section 6 (3) “day care homes” be included in the language (line 179).** We want to encourage as many day care and home care centers to offer the program as possible.

The WIC program is a preventative nutrition program that provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, and access to health care to low-income pregnant women, new mothers, and infants and children at nutritional risk. To be eligible for participation in the WIC program an individual must be (1) low-income with a household income below 185% of the federal poverty level; (2) nutritionally at risk, as evaluated by a health professional and (3) a pregnant or postpartum woman, or an infant, or a child under five.

Participants are provided with a monthly food package tailored to enhance their health and nutritional needs which includes vitamins and mineral content usually missing in a low-income diet. Children who receive WIC food packages have lower incidences of iron-deficiency anemia. This is vitally important as anemia affects a child’s ability to learn, as well as decreases motor development and creates an increase to susceptibility to lead poisoning.

It is also one of the most effective nutrition programs in the federal arsenal to defeat food insecurity and related outcomes. It is estimated that every dollar spent on WIC results in a savings of between \$1.77 and \$3.13 in Medicaid cost to newborns and their mothers. That cost estimate does not include the future savings in successfully preventing overweight and ensuing diseases in young children – creating healthy habits in early life. Additionally, a University of California and RAND study showed that WIC participation improved birth outcomes by reducing low birth weight by 29% and very low birth weight by half. This is significant as low and very low birth weight babies are at significant risk for lower earnings, education status and employment rates as adults.

As you can see, these federally funded programs are meant to ensure that children have the necessary nutrition needed to be healthy, to learn and to play. In many instances, when a child has enough to eat the overall family nutritious needs are met. It is critically important in these times of need that there is proper outreach and coordination of programs and that these programs are accessible in a timely manner, especially the SNAP program.