END HUNGER CONNECTICUT!
Making Room at the Table

Testimony in Opposition to SB 177 – An Act Concerning Vending Machine Sales
Before the Commerce Committee
February 25, 2010

Good afternoon Senator LeBeau, Representative Berger and members of the Commerce Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization. I am here today to voice our opposition to SB 17, An Act Concerning Vending Machine Sales. This legislation flies in the face of current thinking and practice in many states who are raising taxes on sodas and candy as a way to curb obesity in our country.

Childhood obesity is a critical public health crisis that must be addressed through thoughtful public policy. Consumption of candy and soda is on the rise and candy consumption increased steadily since the mid-1970s. Per capita consumption of soft drinks nearly tripled between 1977 and 2000. The evidence is stronger than ever that soda and candy consumption is one of the triggers to obesity. Soda does not satiate the way other drinks do so people are getting the calories without the feeling of fullness, thereby often eating more. The state should not be encouraging the consumption of foods that increase the already burgeoning obesity epidemic.

Given the costs of obesity to the state in terms of lost work time, illness and other medical costs due to obesity and heart disease we should not be creating policy that removes needed revenue from the very goods that help create the issues. Certainly, now is not the time to give a tax credit for two of the three items that are neither considered a meal nor a food – liquor, candy and soda. Frankly, we just can't afford to give up any revenue in Connecticut at this time, and certainly not give a credit to the very goods that potentially cost the state in the long run.

Connecticut is in good company. Most of our neighbor states have some sort of tax on non-nutritional foods, such as Maine's 5.5% sales tax on snack foods, soda, ice cream and toaster pastries, New Jersey's 6% sales tax on candy and soda, New York's 7.5% sales tax on candy and sweetened beverages with less than 70% natural fruit juices, and Rhode Island 4 cent tax per case on soda, mineral water and beer. In Massachusetts, a soda tax is part of the Governor's revenue stream for this coming year. In fact, only 10 states do not have a tax on soda or snack foods. Connecticut would be taking a step backward in the passage of this legislation.

As more research comes out concerning the deleterious effects that sugar has on our health, we must move forward to create policy toward a healthier Connecticut – both for our residents and fiscally. For those reasons I urge you not to pass this legislation.

Thank you.

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