



March 8, 2010

The Honorable Thomas P. Gaffey, Co-Chair
The Honorable Andrew Fleischmann, Co-Chair
Education Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

Testimony concerning cuts to the Healthy Food Certification program

Dear Chairmen Gaffey and Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding proposed cuts to the healthy Food Certification (HFC) program. We encourage the Committee to keep the program fully funded at its present rate.

The Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University conducts strategic research to answer questions often raised when nutrition and food policies are being considered, concerning their impact and effectiveness. We have been studying the food environment and nutrition policies in Connecticut public schools for the past several years.

The HFC program helps the children at highest risk for poor nutrition to have access to better foods. At present, 112 (61.2%) eligible school districts and schools participate, including Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury, and Windham. To decrease the funding for this program will disproportionately impact the children in our state who have the greatest need for access to healthy food.

Several of our studies demonstrate the importance and impact of the Healthy Food Certification (HFC) program and the need to keep it fully funded.

Changing food in schools *can* make a meaningful improvement in children's diets overall. The Rudd Center conducted a study in Connecticut middle schools during the pilot phase of the HFC program, to test whether, as claimed, children would simply compensate for the loss of access to high-calorie, high-fat "junk" foods in schools by consuming more at home. The findings were clear: children eat the foods that are sold in school. If those foods are healthy, they eat more healthy food; if they are unhealthy, they eat more unhealthy food. Most importantly, the study found in those schools selling only

the healthy foods, children did NOT compensate by eating more junk food at home. These findings demonstrate the need to do everything possible to support the schools' efforts to sell only healthy food.

Healthy Food Certification schools show a significant reduction in the sales of unhealthy snacks, as opposed to non-participating schools. On average, of schools participating in the HFC program, 91% showed a reduction as opposed to a 41% reduction for non-participating schools. These numbers vary slightly when broken down by grade level:

- Elementary schools: 86% reduction of unhealthy snacks, with a 47% reduction in non-participating schools.
- Middle schools: 93% reduction vs. 34% in non-participating schools.
- High schools: 94% reduction vs. 40 % in non-participating schools.

The districts in our state with the fewest resources have done the most in recent years to improve the healthfulness of their schools. We assessed all of the School Wellness Policies in Connecticut and found that the strongest policies were in our poorest cities. The schools have been doing their part – food service directors, superintendents, principals and parents have worked together on policies to improve how children eat in the public schools. The HFC program supports their ongoing efforts.

We strongly encourage the Committee to recommend that the funding for the Healthy Food Certification program remain at its current level. While we are fully aware of the present economic crisis, we urge you to make it a priority to feed Connecticut's children healthy foods, especially through a program which has proven successful.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marlene B. Schwartz, Ph.D.
Deputy Director

Roberta R. Friedman
Director of Public Policy