



Testimony regarding H.B. No. 5030 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2015.

February 24, 2014

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dawn Crayco and I am the Deputy Director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a state-wide non-profit advocacy, outreach, and education organization. I am writing to comment on the proposed State Department of Education budget in the Governor's budget and in support of efforts to increase funding for after school programs.

I would like to address two areas in the State Department of Education budget. One is the School Breakfast including the School Breakfast line item. While the School Breakfast Program is primarily funded with federal dollars, the state has traditionally added a small amount of funding it for schools with high free and reduced price participating students or severe-need. We are very happy and grateful that there were no cuts to the School Breakfast line item and there was a small increase in anticipation of additional schools coming on. This consistent support from the Governor and CT Legislature has made it possible for thousands of additional children to eat a healthy breakfast each day at school, thus preparing them for academic and life success. A recent study by Deloitte showed that students who eat breakfast at school perform 17.5% higher on math test scores and attend 1.5 more days of school than those who do not.

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 take advantage of the program. A short and informal survey of school food service directors who have received the grant showed an average increase in student participation of 138%.

Connecticut, while still last in the nation for the number of schools serving breakfast has experienced dramatic increases in the number of children eating breakfast at school over the past few years. We attribute this mostly to the outreach that is going on in the state through the CT No Kid Hungry Campaign, a collaboration between EHC!, the Governor's Office, and a national anti-hunger organization, Share our Strength, to maximize participation in child nutrition programs; as well as the efforts of a task force called the CT Breakfast Expansion Team. The Team includes the following organizations; CT State Department of Education, End Hunger Connecticut!, School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, the CT Department of Administrative Services, CT Action for Healthy Kids and the New England Dairy and Food Council.

The state funding available to help school food service operations through the School Breakfast state reimbursements and in-classroom breakfast grants helps ensure program stability and creates opportunity to purchase equipment or modify and expand programs to make breakfast more accessible to students at school, thus increasing participation.

Secondly, another option for our schools to support strong and stable food service departments is the Healthy Food Certification Program, or Health Food Initiative as proposed in the General Fund. Currently, if schools operating the National School Lunch Program choose to serve only healthy a la carte foods, as described by the State Department of Education, they receive an additional \$0.10 per meal served. This national precedent has been a huge incentive for over 150 school districts (77.3%) to serve healthier menu items served alongside the reimbursable meal. It appears that the Governor intends to maintain funding. End Hunger Connecticut! is in full support of this. Research continues to show that students who eat healthy are better able to learn and perform well in school.

A study done by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale shows that schools that are part of the Healthy Food Certification program has better scores in teaching students about nutrition, serving healthier foods in all parts of the schools and, most importantly, is being translated to healthier nutritional choices in students' homes.

It's important to reiterate that the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program are federal programs with money already allocated to CT in reimbursement costs. Still, funds are not being drawn down like they could be. Take for instance, the School Breakfast Program. CT's school breakfast participation rate is 46.9, meaning less than half of low income children eating school lunch are also accessing school breakfast. If CT were to raise participation to just 70%, we could bring in an additional 9 million dollars. Following best practices that increase access to breakfast, like serving in the classroom and after the school bell brings can significantly increase participation

Finally, End Hunger CT! is in support of the CT After School Network's proposals to 1) Reinstate full funding for the After School Grants programs 2.) Reinstate "After School Quality Enhancement and 3.) Create a new Summer Learning Grants Program. EHC! has been conducting outreach for nutrition programs that serve children when school is out for over ten years. These programs, including the After School Snack Program, At-Risk After School Meal Program and most notably, the Summer Meal Programs, work best and are sometimes only able to operate when they are paired and incorporated into high quality programming opportunities for kids.

In summer meal programs, activities act as magnets to draw in children to summer meal sites and also help to remove the stigma from participation in the meal service alone. We have also heard from community partners that after-school program participation increases when a snack or meal is being offered. The federal nutrition programs work in tandem with out-of-school programming opportunities and our staff often look for this programming in communities when looking to ensure there locations for kids to go for healthy meals when school is out. Any initiative to boost the availability of quality programming for non-profits increases accessibility to meal programs as well.

School meals are some of the only nutritious meals student of low income households receive and depend on. It's our responsibility to make them accessible. If we want our children to succeed, and I believe we all do, then we must give them the tools to learn to the best of their ability.

Thank you.