



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
THE CITY OF WATERBURY
CONNECTICUT

Honorable Members of the Environment Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly
Room 3200, Legislative Office Building
Hartford CT, 06106

Honorable Members:

I am submitting this written testimony to the Environment Committee in support of the passage of Senate Bill 313.

The Waterbury Department of Public Health serves a population of 110,366 Connecticut residents. 40% of single mothers with children under the age of 18 living at home have income under the federal poverty level. 12.7 % of the total population is unemployed. The Women, Infants & Children (WIC) supplemental food program operates out of the Waterbury Department of Public Health and serves a regional client base of over 5,000 women and families. The most densely populated areas of residents receiving these benefits are located in census tracts designated by the United States Department of Agriculture as food deserts. There are, in fact, 7 food desert areas throughout the city. Food deserts are identified by low income, lack of transportation and proximity to the nearest supermarket. As a result, a primary food source for many residents is their neighborhood corner store. Many of these stores accept supplemental food benefits and are utilized by WIC recipients to shop for food. The items offered at these locations are packaged and/or prepared foods that are calorie dense but nutrient poor. Attempts to encourage storeowners to sell fresh fruits and vegetables have been met with logistical difficulties such as lack of refrigeration and the shelf life of produce. A recently completed community health assessment revealed that the city-wide obesity rate is 35.5%, higher than both state and national averages. Diseases associated with obesity and malnutrition (diabetes, hypertension, cholesterol, asthma) are also significantly elevated. Therefore increasing access to healthy foods is a priority.

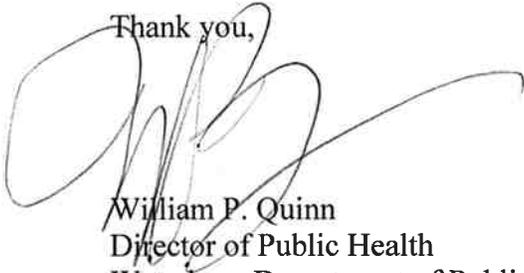
The farmer's markets are popular city-wide and Brass City Harvest works tirelessly to find ways to help residents access the fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables they provide. This includes establishing a year-round, centrally-located indoor market, a mobile market that can travel to neighborhoods, schools, and other convenient locations in food desert areas, and continuing to work with neighborhood corner stores to stock and sell produce. Despite these efforts, a major barrier remains that the residents who struggle the most to maintain healthy diets cannot use WIC to purchase produce at the farmer's markets. This compels residents who rely on WIC to continue to purchase the unhealthy

options that are accessible to them and their children. Simply put, the interest is there, but the means is not. This creates a situation where efforts to educate, motivate, and increase convenience are helpful, but ineffective.

WIC was established to help women who are financially struggling to avoid worsened health due to poor nutrition, and especially to protect children from those outcomes. Enabling farmer's markets to accept this food assistance will help to fulfill that purpose and give our residents the means to make smart, healthy food choices for themselves and their families.

On behalf of the City of Waterbury Department of Public Health, please say yes to increasing access to healthy foods for citizens of all ages and levels of income. Please say yes to enabling residents to put WIC to the best use possible. Please say yes to this bill.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. P. Quinn', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

William P. Quinn
Director of Public Health
Waterbury Department of Public Health
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