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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 on behalf of Brass City Harvest, Inc., of Waterbury, a 501(c)(3) non-profit agricultural and human services organization, and on behalf of the thousands of low-income households and elderly citizens we provide services to through our urban agricultural and farmers' market programs.

We have tried in vain to work with the Connecticut Department of Agriculture for the better part of the last two years to allow this organization to accept seasonal WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons at our year-round, indoor, CT Grown farmers' market, and our mobile farmers' market program that visits sites that include Waterbury's senior centers and both hospitals. Both sides have been unable to create a situation that would allow a pilot program in Waterbury without flying in the face of statutory law.

Raised Bill 5088 is our attempt to answer the need that exists not only in Waterbury – but in every major municipality in the State of Connecticut - to put more Connecticut Grown produce on the tables of our most vulnerable citizens. Simply "*handing out*" WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons is not enough; this bill allows us to go one step further and bring Connecticut Grown produce to the very doorsteps of those most in need in every urban nook and cranny.

The Statutes of the State of Connecticut that govern the definition of a "*farmer*", "*farmers' markets*", "*certified farmers' markets*" and the entitlement programs that are operated through those certified markets were designed to maintain the integrity of the Connecticut farmer and the CT Grown brand. No one has more respect for our farmers or the CT Grown program than we, at Brass City Harvest. However, statutory law has failed to keep pace with the cold facts about food security in the State of Connecticut and the need to enhance the Connecticut Grown branding within burgeoning urban cultures in the State of Connecticut by increasing accessibility to locally sourced agricultural produce and goods.

The intention of Raised Bill 5088 is not to circumvent statutory law, but redefine it in such a way as to serve our citizenry and promulgate Connecticut Grown produce for some of our most difficult client populations. Passage of this bill would enable Brass City Harvest – once certified by the Commissioner of Agriculture – to accept WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program

Coupons at its fixed, year-round location, and all of its mobile farmers' market sites. Our mobile farmers' market program visits all of the senior centers in Waterbury, as well as Waterbury Hospital and St. Mary's Hospital. We have an ongoing partnership with the Waterbury Health Department as a steering committee member of the Greater Waterbury Health Partnership and the Waterbury Healthy Corner Store Initiative. All of these locations are meccas for the elderly and WIC mothers and their children. *"What better way to increase access to fresh Connecticut Grown food than by meeting the very clients these programs are meant to serve right at their most convenient gathering places?"*

Brass City Harvest purchases all of its produce from a network of partner farmers; when we buy more – particularly at off-season times like the winter months – the farmers see increased revenue. Our farmers have a strong bond to Brass City Harvest and they appreciate our hard work and a customer who pays them promptly for their goods. There may exist a fallacy within some circles that Brass City Harvest stands to "make a profit" if the statutory laws are redefined but that is simply not true. Brass City Harvest – like many small customers, purchases goods at a tiered rate that is slightly under a farmers' (or farmstand) retail price. Our goal is not to make a profit – our mission is to feed people – and we do so, much of the time, at our cost. There are price points, inspections, and state oversight that force strict adherence to Connecticut Department of Agriculture regulations. *There are no profits in this business – there are only untold thousands of people who need food.*

As an agricultural non-profit that operates at least two farmers' markets on any given day (fixed location and a mobile market), we are often thrust into the midst of the people we're supposed to serve. Think of your own families; if an elderly relative had to travel downtown, pay for public transportation and perhaps change buses, just to get to the farmers' market only to find out that it's not "certified" and therefore the market can't accept their Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program Coupon, two things will happen: 1) the elderly patron will become extremely upset (justifiably so), and 2) the farmers' market and the CT Grown program (and the farmers) will have lost a customer forever because the elderly patron will *never* forget the inconvenience they suffered because of a law that doesn't mean anything to them. All the elderly patron understand is that he or she has a booklet of coupons that are now worthless to them because they're not going to spend any more time and money to come back downtown on a Thursday or whatever day when the seasonal "certified" market operates for a couple of hours. We've lost a customer, the state has lost a customer, and a farmer has lost a customer. This scenario was repeated more times than I could count during the summer of 2013.

We, at Brass City Harvest, think the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and most especially, Commissioner Steven Reviczky are second to none in our great nation. However on the issues concerning redefining statutory law, we disagree. Brass City Harvest lives and dies based upon the availability of agricultural products produced in the State of Connecticut. We ask our legislators equally, to stand behind us as we endeavor to serve the needs of a disadvantaged community.

Sincerely,



Susan G. Pronovost
Executive Director