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Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Governor's budget proposal eliminates several preventive and forward thinking programs that are vital to supporting families in Middletown. While the savings to our state budget are small for each of the programs that I and my colleagues are speaking about today, the impact on the health and mental health of our families is tremendous. **Healthy Food Certification, Help Me Grow, Community Plans for Early Childhood, Early Literacy Grants, and the Parent Trust are vital to supporting families and children in this state who need our support the most. I urge you to restore funding for all of these programs.**

I am the parent of two girls, one in 6th grade in public school, and one in preschool. I'm a Public Health Nutritionist and have been working with various sectors of CT's food system since I moved here in 1995. I have many years of experience working on both the "personal responsibility" side as well as the "environmental" side of our obesity epidemic. There are plenty of studies that show, when children are offered healthy choices, in the absence of addictive junk foods, they will choose what their bodies tell them they need. When we allow junk foods into the mix, the addictive qualities that are engineered into these foods over power the education we work so hard to provide about healthy choices. We cannot promote health and improve educational outcomes when we allow Big Food and Big Soda to rule our school cafeterias. I fought hard against these companies to enact the Healthy Food Certification program. We cannot balance budgets, any budgets, at the expense of our children's health and their education.

Please restore **Healthy Food Certification** for school meals. Without this certification program I fear that the school districts with the tightest budgets, the districts with disproportionate numbers of low-income families, with students struggling to get a good education and get ahead, will be the districts that re-introduce competitive "junk" foods in order to balance their budgets. These are the students who will be most impacted by poor nutrition over their lifetimes. As a State we will pay for this budget cut directly, in Medicaid health care costs, and indirectly through poor learning outcomes that keep students from making a living wage.

We have a huge achievement gap that is paralleled by a huge health gap for low-income and minority residents in this State. We cannot afford to eliminate the Healthy Food Certification program.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Monica Belyea, MPH, RD