



Testimony before the Appropriation subcommittee on Agriculture
March 2, 2015

H.B. 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization. I am also the vice-chair of the Connecticut Food Policy Council and it is in that position that I speak before you today.

The Department of Agriculture has a large role in our quality of life in Connecticut. Not only do our farmers bring in fresh and local food they play a positive role in our state economy. Support for locally grown foods, coupons for seniors to use at Farmer's Markets increases the food security of this vulnerable population. End Hunger CT! is grateful for the continued support for those programs in the Governor's proposed budget.

As part of the proposed budget the Community Investment Act funds for the CT Food Policy Council was swept as part of the deficit mitigation and three quarters of its funding is swept for the next biennium. The CIA sweep affects many successful programs in the state, programs that increase Connecticut's quality of life and increase our economy as well from farmland preservation, and funds for groups that increase access to our local commodities.

One is particular is the CT Food Policy Council. The Council was created in 1997 by the state legislature in Sec. 22-456 of the CT General Statutes. It provides the opportunity for representatives of state agencies and private organizations to discuss issues, develop policies and government actions that influence the availability, affordability, quality and safety to our food supply. The Council was the first statewide food policy council in the nation, beginning a tradition that has been emulated in many states.

This year we have been working with the Zwick Center at UConn School of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources to reexamine the status of community food security in CT. The report, in partnership with Zwick Center and The CT Food Policy Council was last completed in 2012. This report has been used by many entities to support policy recommendations and for funding to improve community food security in the state. It can also be used to determine if policies put in place are working to increase the reach of the food system. The Connecticut Food Policy Council had committed, through a vote, of funding \$15,000 to the completion of the report. The work has started yet the funding has been swept by the Governor's deficit mitigation plan.

The 2015 report will be a series of 4 reports to be released in phases throughout the year. The first report is anticipated to be released in mid-April with the final report to be released by the end of 2015. The reports will include:

1. Community Risk of Food Insecurity and Utilization of Public Food Assistance Programs (Ranking 169 towns in CT)

2. Retail Food Availability (Ranking 169 towns in CT)
3. Food Affordability (Ranking areas of CT)
4. Evaluating Community Food Security in CT

The CT Food Policy Council anticipated that we would present the findings to local food policy councils, town districts, and other community organizations following the release of the third report in order to begin the discussion as to how to move some positive policies forward. With the loss of the funding this is in serious jeopardy.

Additionally, the CT Food Policy Council is working with the local food policy council's across the state as a liaison and providing technical assistance. Many local food policy councils are doing innovative work on a variety of issues from food reclamation to increasing program access to the number of federal food programs (programs that bring in significant funds to our state while feeding families in need so they can learn and work effectively) . Later this month the Council is hosting a webinar for local councils on building impact in the community. We plan on sharing best practices to increase the reach of the local councils.

Of note, the CT Food Policy Council is facilitating a discussion on the Community Health Needs Assessment. New IRS rules for tax-exempt hospitals are encouraging them to “[prevent illness, to ensure adequate nutrition, or to address social, behavioral, and environmental factors that influence health in the community](#)”. The shift in emphasis for hospitals to offer community benefits that go beyond access to services creates an opportunity for the health care sector to play a major role in improving access to healthy food and preventing chronic-diet related disease. Increased attention to community health improvement and prevention can help improve the health of their patients and lower healthcare costs while increasing access to urban agriculture, farmers markets, healthy corner store initiatives, and a variety of food programs.

The CT Food Policy Council was planning to host an informational meeting with hospital and community leaders, with the local councils to determine what are some areas for the hospitals to engage in. Working together we can affect food insecurity while increasing our local food production in the state. Cutting the funds to the Ct Food Policy Council limits our reach and ability to increase the reach of the CHNA.

The Council is not looking for a large amount of funding. We would like our initial funding of \$25,000 to be reinstated to us. Now, the funds are gone. While we understand the concept of shared sacrifice losing all the funding we have had in one sweep is devastating and leaves a large void in a program that will increase both food access, local agriculture, and brings government, non-profits and local community members together to build a better food policy for the state.

Thank you very much.