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**Written Testimony of Lonnie Burt, for the Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2015**

**HB06824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR
AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE.**

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lonnie Burt and I am a Registered Dietitian, the Senior Director of Food & Child Nutrition Services for Hartford Public Schools and President Elect for the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut.

I would like to address the biennial budget released by Governor Malloy on February 18th that proposes to eliminate 4.8 million dollars in funding for the Healthy Food Certification program, otherwise known as Healthy Food Certification which provides funds to school districts based on the total number of lunches served during the prior school year. For years, Connecticut and our school nutrition programs have been leaders on the national front, providing meals and snacks that exceed federal nutrition standards. This funding is extremely important to all districts participating because it goes beyond snacks and fundraising activities and impacts the overall school wellness environment within each district.

Presently in Hartford approximately 56% of enrolled students live in households that receive SNAP benefits formerly known as food stamps. To give you a perspective, a family of four can have a gross income of no greater than \$597 per week to qualify for SNAP benefits. Clearly these guidelines make it challenging for any household to maintain a food budget that includes a variety of nutrient dense foods such as whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables and lean proteins needed for health promotion and disease prevention. School meals in Hartford are a partner with these families to expand access to foods that promote health.

The funding we receive in Hartford is approximately \$325,000 annually which represents 5% of our total food budget, and 32.5% of our total fresh produce budget. The loss of this funding will have a direct impact on the quantity and variety of fresh produce we will be able to offer our students. It has been my experience that students choose and consume more fruits and vegetables when fresh produce is offered. If less fresh produce is offered, there will be an overall negative impact on the health and well-being of our students today and in the future. Part of my responsibility is to help the students we are feeding today to become life-long healthy eaters. This funding is imperative to that mission.

As with most School Food Service Programs, our program needs to be self-sufficient and not rely on subsidies from the Board of Education general budget. We need to operate a balanced budget regardless of financial constraints which is always challenging. Historically, one of the ways school

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districts generate income and balance their budgets is to sell additional snack foods during meal service that are not under the USDA meal pattern guidelines. Presently, in Hartford we are fortunate to be able to limit the sale of snack foods that meet the Connecticut nutrition standards at the secondary schools only. This is due in part to our district's participation in Healthy Food Certification and the additional funding we receive. Eliminating this funding may require selling additional snack food type items district-wide to balance our budget. This could lead to students choosing snack foods instead of lunch. As a Registered Dietitian I find the choices required to balance the budget are always difficult, and having to increase snack food sales is something I do not condone.

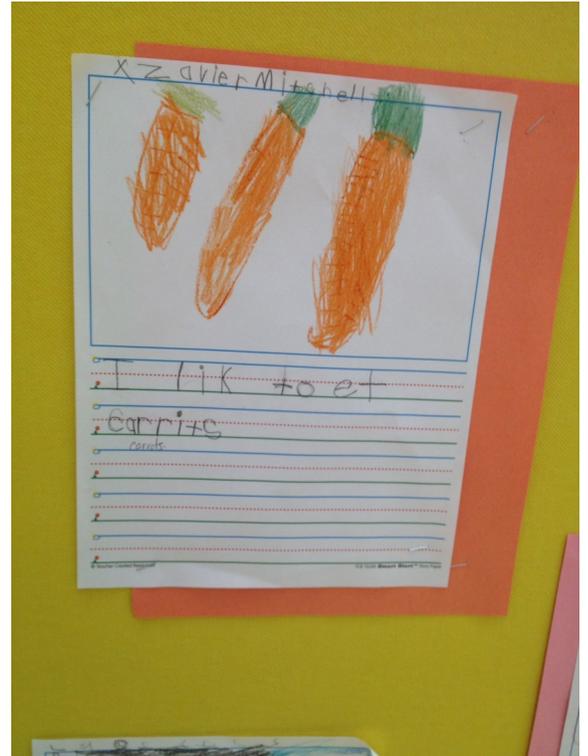
School nutrition programs in Connecticut have been historically underfunded. State funding is based on a block grant instituted in the 1980's and has been flat funded since. The funding formula is based on the aggregate number of meals served annually. As the number of meals served annually in Connecticut has increased, the state funding to the school meal programs has significantly decreased; approximately 55%. Originally the block grant was funded at 10 cents per meal and today it is less than 5 cents per meal. Over the last thirty years, inflation has resulted in an increase in operating costs while the funding has continued to decrease.

In addition, Healthy Food Certification influences the whole school environment particularly fundraising activities that occur on school campuses. Districts participating in Healthy Food Certification must follow the stringent fundraising guidelines which require food items being sold to adhere to the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. I personally have seen a significant decrease in the amount of candy, bake, and other junk-food type sales that were occurring in our schools prior to participating in Healthy Food Certification.

School foodservice directors across Connecticut recognize the challenges faced when it comes to high rates of childhood obesity, hunger and the lack of a balanced diet. We are committed to working hard to assist in the effort to provide our students with affordable, healthy, fresh, and delicious food options. Discontinuing Healthy Food Certification funding is a disservice to the health and well-being of students in Hartford as well as the state. I strongly urge you to reject the Governor's budget proposal to eliminate the Healthy Foods Initiative.



Staff at Capital Prep Setting Up Serving Line



Student Poster at Parkville Elementary



Fruit Trays Ready to Serve at Global Communications

