



Testimony of Lucy Nolan, before the Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2015

HB 6824 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE.

Good evening 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 that focuses on policy, education and outreach on the federal food programs. I am here today to speak to adjustments in the appropriations to the State Department of Education budget through the Governor’s Recommendations.

I would like to address the elimination of the Healthy Food Initiative which is the funding school districts receive for agreeing to the CT Nutrition Standards. Currently, if schools choose to serve only healthy foods, as defined by the State Department of Education, they receive an additional \$0.10 per meal served. This is a huge incentive for over 163 (86%) of eligible school districts to serve healthier menu items.

The Governor’s recommendation to cut the \$.10 per meal incentive will be prohibitive in continuing to serve higher quality food to students. For example, with such a decrease, New Haven Public Schools would receive more than \$257,000 less funding per year, cutting fresh fruits and vegetables and potentially schools district will have to subsidize food services. On top of sacrificing nutritional quality, districts will be considering their financial viability in funding other vital programs such as the Summer Meals Programs that feed thousands of children in Connecticut each summer.

Connecticut school nutrition programs have been historically underfunded. When Healthy Food Certification was adopted in 2006, it was the first opportunity districts had for an increase in state funding in twenty years; and yet ten cents is still not enough to cover the cost of healthier foods. Connecticut lags behind at least twenty other states in the amount of state funding provided to support schools meals, including our neighbors in Massachusetts, Maine, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Healthy Food Cuts: Impact Survey Results

Since hearing about the proposed cut, we have conducted a survey with school food service directors to identify the impacts the cut would have on their operations and the children they serve. Overall, directors who responded expressed significant concern on the quality of the food they would be able to provide, the inability to continue to serve as much local produce (as it costs more), and worries about having to reduce labor costs and cut workers hours due to the impact of decreased funding and the impact lower participation would have on bringing in federal reimbursements.

Survey Results when asked: What benefits have you seen with Healthy Food Certification?	
Answer Choices	Responses
A healthier school environment overall	92%

Improved participation in your school lunch and/or breakfast programs	50%
The ability to provide healthier meal options at breakfast or lunch	79%
Improved sales of healthier a la carte foods sold	71%

From a food security perspective, school meals are sometimes the only meals students of low income households receive; it's our responsibility to make them the healthiest they can be. A study done by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale shows that schools that are part of the Healthy Food Certification program has better scores in teaching students about nutrition, serving healthier foods in all parts of the schools and, most importantly, is being translated to healthier nutritional choices in the student's homes. Nationally, studies prove that schools that remove junk food have more students partaking in school lunches and serve many more free and reduced price meals. **More meals means more federal dollars AND healthier children.** Even as national school nutrition standards have been strengthened, CT has continued to ensure our state goes above and beyond wherever possible.

The very reason that the National School Lunch Program began in 1946 was as a "measure of national security" in response to the fact that many young WWII draftees were nutritionally unfit to go to war. Today this program ensures that children in the United States receive at least one healthy meal per school day guaranteeing our continued national security. During the current economic climate, it is important we stay true to this foundation by continuing to maintain and grow funding for these federal nutrition programs. Children and families need the state's support more now than ever and we have an opportunity to see this through while bringing more federal dollars into Connecticut.

In additional to protecting what is working, we urge you to consider instituting a Child Nutrition Outreach Program (see attached) that uses proven strategies to **feed more children and capture federal dollars.** Focused on increasing participation and access to School Breakfast, Afterschool and Summer Meals, this would support school districts and non-profits with technical assistance, outreach techniques, and community organizing around maximizing federal reimbursements for all federally funded child nutrition programs. EHC!'s work has shown that for **every .52 cents spent on summer meals outreach at least 1 additional meal is served and \$3.49 in federal funds are brought into the community - a six-fold increase in dollars to local communities.** This small investment will increase reimbursements that go directly into communities in need while feeding children.

We understand that the state is in a difficult budget situation and must make choices, but we urge you not to compromise the health of our youth in doing so. Healthier students, mean more productive students who do better in school and are able to grow into productive and successful members of society. Instead, we ask you preserve this investment in our future and consider other measures that help to bring even more federal dollars into the state.