



New Covenant United Methodist Church

16 Church Street

EAST HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06108

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Testimony of Rev. Gary Richards, before the Education 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 evening Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Gary Richards and I am the pastor of New Covenant United Methodist Church in East Hartford. New Covenant United Methodist Church is located at 16 Church Street in the Burnside Avenue area of East Hartford. I am here to ask you to reject the Governor's proposal to eliminate the Healthy Food Initiative, which helps ensure healthy food is available to students at school.

New Covenant United Methodist Church is a local congregation committed to the wellbeing of the surrounding neighborhood and neighbors. This commitment is reflected in the recent investment of nearly \$1,000,000 in building improvements in order to become a community center focused on the needs of our neighbors. Currently, the church collaborates with community organizations and public agencies to provide adult education, recovery meetings, support groups and social programs. More specific to my being here this evening is the congregation's active role in the organization and support of the East Hartford Hunger Action Team. The East Hartford Hunger Action Team is a coalition of community groups and neighbors organized and active in the effort to find solutions to the problems of food insecurity in East Hartford.

It is out of this commitment to our neighbors and to addressing food insecurity in East Hartford that I urge the Committee to reject the Governor's budget proposal to eliminate the Health Foods Initiative. New Covenant United Methodist Church and its community partners are working hard to develop new options for the provision of healthy food for our East Hartford neighbors. One of these options is the development and support of school based community gardens. School based gardens are proven sources of fresh vegetables as well as a learning opportunity for teachers and students. However, while community gardens are very important and add to a local school's capacity to provide health food, they are only one piece in the food insecurity puzzle. The elimination of the Healthy Food Initiative will be a devastating set back to the community effort of piecing together increased health food options. The loss of public school income for food services will not only reduce healthy food options but also create budgetary shortfalls resulting in program reductions including the Summer Meals Program.

The loss of the Summer Meals Program will have a direct impact on New Covenant and Hunger Action Team's ability to reach East Hartford children, youth and families struggling with food insecurity. Limited options during the school year coupled with the loss of summer feeding programs is nothing short of a public health crisis. The connection between Summer Meals sites and community gardens will be lost. Our children and youth will have less fresh fruit and vegetables while in school and then less health food during the summer months. This is a problem that our community efforts will not be able to overcome and cannot afford.

I began my testimony by noting the investment of our local congregation in the wellbeing of neighborhood and neighbors. The New Covenant United Methodist Church commitment is to be part of a community effort to address food insecurity and its root causes. However, our local efforts require the public investment of resources. Eliminating the Healthy Foods Initiative is a divestment that our community cannot afford.

Thank you.