



March 18, 2015

Testimony for the Education Committee on

**H.B. No. 7023 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES**

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education 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 education statutes as it relates nutrition programs, specifically section 14 of the bill which aims to increase awareness and access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Stamps through schools. We are supportive of the intent but recommend a change in the language to ensure Connecticut remains in clear compliance with federal regulations around school meal confidentiality and one that would also increase its impact.

The proposed language would direct CSDE to work with DSS to send notices home with every child receiving free or reduced price meals at school to alert them about assistance available to parents and guardians through SNAP/Food Stamps. The information would include how to qualify for the program, where to obtain applications, and where to get help completing applications. Currently, for families who are currently eligible for SNAP benefits their children are automatically eligible for free lunch, but many may not know if they are receiving free or reduced price meals that they may be eligible for SNAP.

We believe the families who are not aware of SNAP or have the information to access SNAP benefits would benefit from outreach directly from their child's school, a trusted authority. However, federal school meal regulation prohibits targeted outreach to families through the school meals programs; this is called "overt identification". Information sent out through school meals should be sent home to all students enrolled in the school. We believe outreach should be extended to all children enrolled in school as not all families who may be eligible for SNAP participate in free or reduced price school meal programs. For instance, they may choose to bring meals from home due to dietary or religious restrictions that cannot be easily accommodated at school.

In addition, there is a process by which information about SNAP can get to families with children in enrolled in schools. Currently the CSDE provides sample school meal application forms on their website for School Food Authorities to distribute. The CSDE also provides optional addendums for schools to send which can accompany the school meal application. Addendum C applies directly to SNAP and includes information about how to qualify, where to obtain applications, and where to get help completing the applications (see attached). All schools would send out the addendum at the local level. There is a new federal provision called the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) which allows high poverty schools to serve free school meals without applications. By sending out the Addendum those families would learn about their potential eligibility for SNAP.

**Therefore have two change of language suggestions to this legislation. We urge the committee to *add* language on line 485 to add school districts as the mechanism to get the information out to parents or guardians and to *delete* the language on line 486 "receiving free or reduced price meals".**

480 Sec. 14. (NEW) (Effective July 1, 2015) For the school year

481 commencing July 1, 2015, and each school year thereafter, the

482 Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of  
483 Social Services, shall provide notice regarding the supplemental  
484 nutrition assistance program pursuant to the Food and Nutrition Act  
485 of 2008 to school districts for the parent or guardian of each child [receiving free or  
486 reduced price meals] at school. Such notice shall include, (1)  
487 information about how to qualify for the program, (2) where to obtain  
488 applications, and (3) where to get help completing applications.

This change in statute would open additional lines of communication regarding SNAP to families who are struggling to make ends meet and help streamline outreach between federal nutrition programs operating within different agencies. However, we urge you to amend the language as drafted to protect the privacy of families and acknowledge that the system for meal applications already in place, if expanded, could accomplish the goal of this proposal.

Thank you.