

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Department of Education Budgets

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Gail Sharry and I am the Food Service Director for the New Haven Public Schools.

I would like to address the State's current fiscal budget that eliminates State Department of Education programs, including School Breakfast and Healthy Food Certification. I understand the vast challenges to effective budgeting of State funds. However, school nutrition programs have always needed to stretch their dollars, to provide self-sufficient programs for the Boards of Education that they serve. These programs have helped me to provide nutritious meals at breakfast and lunch. For many of New Haven's students, these are their only daily meals. Specifically, in New Haven we have 15,700 students participating and relying on these meal programs to help meet their daily nutritional needs.

Presently, 55.6% of our students live in households that are eligible to receive SNAP benefits (Food stamps). This funding has allowed New Haven Public Schools to provide fresh vegetable bars in all of our 47 schools. These veggie bars are filled with fresh vegetables, greens, and fruit, many of which are grown in "local" farms. The potential loss of these programs will impact our school climate of health and wellness. The implementation of the Healthy Food Certification with related funding inspired our students, principals and staff members to co- create a healthy lifestyle in New Haven Schools

I truly believe eliminating Healthy Food Certification and Breakfast Program Funding takes us a step backwards.

For years, the state of Connecticut and our school nutrition programs have been leaders on the national front, providing nutritious meals and snacks that exceed federal nutrition standards. When Healthy Food Certification was adopted in 2006, Connecticut led the nation in landmark legislation to enforce high nutritional standards for foods sold in school cafeterias and stores and school fundraisers. In 2013 Governor Malloy demanded more participation by public schools and districts to offer a reimbursable breakfast program. Eliminating the support of the Breakfast Program, as well as the Healthy Food Certification Funding, not only undermines the state of Connecticut as a leader in school nutrition and wellness, but sends the message to our students and families that we no longer wish to focus on the fight for enhanced health and wellness. As lately as 2013, Connecticut experienced only 64% of schools serving breakfast to students, while the national average is approximately 90 percent. Studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of students consuming breakfast to ensure and enhance academic learning and success. I truly believe eliminating funding for Breakfast Programs and the Healthy Food Certification takes us a giant step backwards in helping to provide for the nutritional needs of our students.

We are asking that you preserve the benefits of these critical programs, by ensuring that the Healthy Food Certification Program and Breakfast funding remains intact. School Food Service Programs must be self-sufficient. With annual increases to cost from all sources, the loss of this program would have devastating effects on the budget of our School Food Service programs and the students we serve. **Programs that would suffer greatly include our Supper Meal program and Summer Meals programs. In addition our ability to provide fresh local fruits and vegetables is significantly diminished. Please be aware that there is no federal requirement to EVER**

offer fresh fruits or vegetables at breakfast or lunch programs. As a direct result of this loss of funding, many districts may no longer be able to do so in the future.

As a dedicated school food service director, I am able to see first-hand how important the Healthy Foods Certification and the Breakfast Program Funding is to our school districts, students, faculty and families. While school lunch and breakfast programs continue to face obstacles related to limited funding and increasing food costs, school food service directors strive to make progress in improving the quality of meals served to children each and every day. With your continued financial support we strive to continue to do so.

The Healthy Foods Certification funding provided \$287,500 to the New Haven Public Schools program last year. In addition the Breakfast Program funding allowed for \$132,000. This is 3.35% of our total operating budget. Discontinuing Healthy Food Certification and Breakfast Program Funding creates a deep disservice to the health and well-being of our students of Connecticut public schools. I strongly urge you to reject the Governor's budget proposal to eliminate the Healthy Foods Initiative.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. Please feel free to contact me if I can answer any questions for you or provide you with any additional information.