



Testimony of the Commissions on Women, Children & Seniors and Equity & Opportunity Submitted to the Human Services Committee February 28, 2019

RE: HB 7165, An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage for Donor Breast Milk, and H.B. 7121, an Act Concerning Semi-Monthly Transfers of Supplemental Nutrition Benefits.

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, Ranking and other distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the above referenced bills. My name is Steven Hernández and I am the Executive Director of the Commissions on Women, Children & Seniors and Equity & Opportunity. I am joined by our 2GEN legislative fellow, Rosa Rada.

Regarding **H.B. 7165**, this Act would increase access to donor milk in medically necessary scenarios. In many of these scenarios, donor milk is a lifeline. UNICEF states that donor milk significantly reduces the risk of adverse health outcomes like necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) and sepsis. In addition to being extremely beneficial, donor breast milk is also extremely expensive at about \$4-5 per ounce. This price puts it out of reach for many families in need. Though donor milk is costly, providing insurance coverage for it saves states money by averting the highly expensive costs of treating NEC and other preventable disease.

According to the American Pregnancy Association, "Donated breast milk is very safe; it comes from mothers that have pumped more milk than their own baby can eat. Before mothers can donate milk, they are tested for any illness that could pass through their breastmilk. Each container of milk is also tested for harmful bacteria.

The donor milk is then pasteurized to eliminate any infecting organism that could be present in the milk. A small percentage of nutritional and immunological properties are destroyed by pasteurization, but pasteurized milk retains many of its beneficial properties. It contains tremendous special properties that cannot be duplicated by commercial milk formulas."

New York, California, Missouri, Kansas, Texas, Utah, and Washington D.C. all have similar statutes in place. Connecticut needs to follow suit in order to protect this extremely vulnerable infant population and their families from negative health outcomes and an undue cost burden.

Regarding **H.B. 7121**, this Act would change the issuance schedule of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits from once a month to twice a month. Currently, 437,530 Connecticut residents, about a third of which are children, experience food insecurity. SNAP, the largest nutrition assistance program in the state, acts as the primary domestic hunger safety net for families experiencing financial hardship.

This change in issuance schedule for benefits, while seemingly minute and bureaucratic, offers an opportunity to support our state's food retailers while improving food access and equity for our residents.



According to the USDA, a majority of SNAP recipients spend their benefits within the first two weeks of receiving them. Since many states – Connecticut included – issue SNAP benefits at the same time each month, grocery stores often experience a spike in sales at the beginning of the month and then a sharp decrease once SNAP customer’s budgets are depleted. Given that grocery stores pay significant fixed costs to operate and generally experience low profit margins, such a retail cycle presents challenges. In our cities and rural towns, where there is the most concentrated food insecurity and lack of access to healthy, affordable food, both grocers and residents lose out.

Changing the issuance schedule for benefits would smooth business cycles for food retailers, especially those in economically distressed areas of the state, while allowing them to provide a more continuous stocking of fresh produce and staple items.

While this is a relatively simple and inexpensive policy solution, versus say, offering tax credits to grocery stores, there is much room for error. In 2015, Maryland changed their SNAP benefit schedule from a 10-day period to a 24-day period, but due to bureaucratic mistakes and a failure to consider the literacy and numeracy levels, language needs, and housing status of their SNAP recipients, a large portion of SNAP recipients did not get notice of the change. Benefits went unused, residents went hungry, and businesses lost money.

CWCS supports efforts to expand food access and equity while supporting local economies and small businesses. However, we urge the Committee to provide clear instructions to the Department of Social Services so that they may carefully and thoughtfully implement such a change.

Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to working with you on these issues and answering any questions.