

# Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-89

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LUNCH DEBT.

**Vote Date:** 2/27/2020

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 2/18/2020

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Committee on Children

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill would stop children from being denied meals for unpaid school lunch debt while also allowing any public or private parties to donate to payoff such debt.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

### **Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner; Department of Education**

Supports the intent of this bill that no student be shamed or overtly identified when their school meal accounts enter into deficit or they have not brought money to school to pay for breakfast and lunch but worries about the impact this will have on school districts.

Most districts rely on the federal reimbursement to operate their school lunch and school breakfast programs, with some additional funding from the state in the form of state match, breakfast subsidies, and an additional 10-cents per meal from the Healthy Foods Initiative. Most districts are not provided with district funds to support the school meals programs. By not being able to balance the provision of food to students with the costs associated with providing those food items, districts will encounter substantial increased costs related to students' unpaid meal charges.

### **Steven Hernandez; Commission on Women, Children, Seniors Equity and Opportunity**

The Commission is supportive of this legislation and urges its passage. Under this bill, no board would be allowed to identify or stigmatize a child for unpaid meals, but they may reach out to the child's parents about the outstanding balance. Further, boards may accept gifts to pay off student lunch debt.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### **State Representative Mary Mushinsky**

Representative Mushinsky supports this bill as it will prevent the withholding of meals from students whose parents have not paid the child's food service debt and allow the establishment of a fund to assist those families with an unpaid debt.

### **State Representative Michael Winkler**

Representative Winkler supports this bill. He believes that we should not frustrate or embarrass children because their parents have not put money in their school lunch accounts. Allowing schools to accept donations to cover these costs is a wonderful idea.

### **Tonya Clark**

Tonya supports this legislation. She sees children frequently skip meals because it is near the end of their parents pay period and they can't afford it. She would like to see every student get meals as part of their schooling than let one more child be hungry and ashamed.

### **School Nutrition Association of Connecticut**

The School Nutrition Association of Connecticut strongly supports this bill. School meals are as important to learning as textbooks and pencils. A hungry student doesn't retain or learn as well as a student who has had a full meal.

### **Michael Thompson**

He supports this legislation and doesn't mind his tax dollars going up a little bit to make sure no child goes hungry.

### **Honorah O'Neill**

Honorah supports this legislation. Aside from the monetary impact on poor families, and improving the physical wellbeing of children, it provides a psychological safety net to the most at-risk kids. Remove that burden and that frees up space to learn.

### **James Naddeo**

James writes in strong support of this bill. He believes that the success of our students is based on nourishment and that a hungry child simply can not perform at a high level in school.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

### **Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.**

The Connecticut Association of boards of Education believes that this legislation, well intended as it may be, could have unintended consequences. They state that operating a school lunch program is exceptionally challenging due to federal requirements and minimal funding and this bill would increase costs.

### **Connecticut Association of School Board Officials**

While the Connecticut Association of School Board Officials agrees that no child should go hungry or be shamed for not being able to afford food, they are worried about the unforeseen consequences. They believe that some parents will take advantage of this change in policy

and that cost will be passed on to the school boards. Most schools already have a policy to make sure children with unpaid lunch debts get meals.

**Becky Tyrell, Plainville Board of Education**

While the intent of the bill is good, they can not support it due to the extra costs that will come with it. When programs are passed without a funding mechanism those costs are passed on, this will result in the school boards having to make cuts elsewhere.

**Reported by: Peter Murszewski**

**Date: 3/20/2020**