

Dear Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, and Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Kelly Caisse. I am a farmer in Chaplin. I am writing to request your support for **HB 6621, specifically section 3 establishing a CT Grown for CT Kids grants program.**

The CT Grown for CT Kids strengthens the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care sites.

Funding from CT Grown for CT Kids can support food-insecure students with healthy, local food, educational experiences for students through STEM and nutrition curriculum, mental well-being of students by bolstering resilience, and providing social emotional support, and school districts as well as early childhood providers in cultivating relationships with local farmers to purchase, promote, and serve CT Grown food.

This program is important to me because I work and volunteer closely with schools and believe that it is imperative that all children have access to fresh local food and learn about where it comes from and how it is grown. Some of the programs that can be instituted in the schools may include cooking demonstrations, gardening lessons, building gardens, farm/greenhouse fieldtrips and/or guest speakers from farms, and providing support/help to the kitchen staff to be able to prepare and serve fresh locally grown produce in the cafeteria. I have also had the opportunity to supply the Windham School District fresh produce during the summer for the Summer Feeding Program. In the past I have brought produce to Chaplin Elementary School as well. It would be great if the school systems would have more of a budget to purchase local food thus they can teach the kids that the food they are eating is from a farm down the road instead of from another country. This access to increased knowledge of good healthy local food will increase healthy eating habits and thus possibly lead to less adolescent diabetes and overweight children. More gardening may happen at the schools therefore giving children the skills needed to grow their own food!! This education will provide life skills for the future.

COVID 19 has affected all of us in some way. From this past year, more people than ever signed up for our CSA and have flocked to the farmers markets. People are cooking more meals from scratch and desire access to local food. At Charles H. Barrows Stem Academy in the Windham School District the teachers are very excited to get their garden beds running this year! When the weather warms up more teachers will be teaching classes outside so as to reduce the spread of COVID 19 and they need support to integrate the garden beds into the teaching curriculum. Garden beds will be more important than ever! This program will help schools build gardens and institute learning places these gardens. This is a perfect time to provide funding to such a grant!!

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

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