

To: CT General Assembly Education Committee

3/17/21

Testimony in Support of HB 6621 - An Act Concerning Assorted Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes

My name is Stephanie Deason and I am testifying for H.B. No. 6621 AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES. I believe using local foods in the Mansfield Public Schools food service program is important because it allows our students access to food they may not otherwise have the opportunity to try at home. It also connects the school system to the local farming community. Parents are delighted to hear when their child has been able to access local foods through meals at school. When school menus feature local foods, the local farming community is also highlighted to a new audience that may not otherwise be aware of available local products.

Ever since I started in my position as a school food service director I have found that pursuing a robust farm to school program requires good communication and having an understanding of the farmer's work. This is key when building relationships for successful purchasing. Implementing a farm to school program takes a lot of time and support from the cafeteria staff, the schools, and the administration. Once an established farm to school program is running well, the opportunity to grow it gets easier and easier.

Small grants can be a catalyst for change. Our own program took off after we were able to purchase a few pieces of equipment that helped us process local food in the summer so we could use it throughout the school year. Without this, we would be limited to only serving local foods while they are in-season, which does not always align with the school year. Having a freezer stock of prepared local vegetables allows cafeteria workers to easily incorporate these ingredients into meals without adding more prep to their busy days' schedule.

A CT Grown for CT Kids grants program could help me do more with my Eat Local at Mansfield Public Schools program, it could fuel many other programs like mine, and it could help build a larger community practice of school food directors that are innovating in the cafeteria while supporting local farm businesses.