



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Office of the Commissioner



Bryan P. Hurlburt
Commissioner

860-713-2501
www.CTGrown.gov

EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
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COMMISSIONER BRYAN P. HURLBURT
HB 6621: AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO
THE EDUCATION STATUTES

Representative Sanchez, Senator McCrory, Ranking Members Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and honorable members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on HB 6621: An Act Concerning Assorted Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes. For the record, I am Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture.

I first want to thank you for your interest in developing a robust farm-to-school grant program in our state. Farm-to-School empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy. Farm-to-school activities provide benefits to students, parents, schools, communities, and food producers, including increased market opportunities for small and diverse farms. Farm-to-School implementation can differ by district, but always includes one or more of the following benefits:

- Local Procurement: local foods are purchased, promoted, and served in the cafeteria or classroom.
- Nutrition/Health Education: students participate in educational activities related to agriculture, food, health, or nutrition.
- School Gardens: students engage in hands-on learning through gardening.
- Local Food System Education: children are connected to the local food system including local farmers and producers to generate an awareness of where food comes from in their community

The Department supports the concept behind the proposal in Section 3, but the current proposal does not provide any funding source for these worthy goals and the Department does not have any funding to dedicate to the project.

Section 3 (c) tasks the Department of Agriculture to convene an advisory committee to assist in the administration of the CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program. the Department would recommend amending the responsibilities of the advisory committee to assist the Commissioner of Agriculture in developing criteria for evaluation of grant applications and awards, and

establishing for evaluation standards for assistance in implementation of such programs. This will permit the Commissioner to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of the advisory committee membership in partnering with schools for successful projects, and streamline the execution of them.

Section 3 (e) would allow the Department of Agriculture to accept gifts, grants, and donations, including in-kind donations, for the administration of the CT Grown for CT Kids. I suggest the language to be aligned with other Department advisory committees and councils, with language similar to:

The Department may receive state, federal and municipal funds and funds from any nonprofit or nongovernmental organization. Such funds may be expended as necessary to perform the Department's duties pursuant to this section. The Department may seek funding for and provide financial support to organizations for activities directly related to farm to school programs.

This program will help transform children's understanding of our food system and will connect them to Connecticut's local producers and farms. However, the program cannot succeed without financial support. In order for the program to have maximum effectiveness for our students and local farms, the program must be designed to enable the Department of Agriculture to efficiently execute this program by designating an annual funding level and allowing us to take advantage of any and all funding and educational resources available on a local, state, and national level.

Thank you again for raising this bill and I will be available to work with the committee members and advocates to ensure we build a successful program.