



March 17, 2021

Education Committee Public Hearing

Testimony in support of:

HB 6617: AAC Authorization of State Grant Commitments for School Building Projects and Revisions to the School Building Projects Statutes -Section 2, Subsection 6

HB 6621: AAC Assorted Revisions and Additions to the Education Statutes-Section 3: CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and members of the Committee, my name is Sally Mancini and I am the Director of Advocacy Resources at the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. The UConn Rudd Center’s mission is to promote solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy. We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to eat healthfully.

The Rudd Center supports HB 6617, Section 2, Subsection 6 which requires newly constructed schools and those undergoing major renovations to include water bottle filling stations in their plans. **Water bottle filling stations provide students with easy access to the healthiest hydration option available.** Promoting water first for thirst is incredibly important for children’s health. On average, children are consuming over 30 gallons of sugary drinks every year—enough to fill a bathtub.¹ Sugary drinks (soda; fruit, energy, and sports drinks; and sweetened teas, coffees, and waters) contribute almost one-half of all added sugar consumed by children and adolescents in the United States.² Research confirms that excess consumption of sugary drinks contributes to the high prevalence of childhood obesity and increases the risk of other chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.³

While we support this bill, we request, alongside our colleagues at the American Heart Association, for the language to be amended to include minimal standards with regards to the placement of these stations. The language should state **“at least one water bottle filling station per 100 students; at least one water bottle filling station on each floor or wing of the building; and at least one water bottle filling station in all food service areas.”** This update will help schools participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or School Breakfast Program to comply with federal regulations requiring that water is available and accessible, free of charge, to students during the meal service.⁴

In regard to **HB 6621, we strongly support Section 3 and the creation of a CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program.** The Rudd Center recently published an analysis of school meals in CT during COVID-19.⁵ When school buildings closed in Spring 2020, the school nutrition safety net could have completely unraveled. Amid unprecedented obstacles, CT’s school food directors rose to the challenge and continued to provide school meals to students in creative ways from grab and go sites to delivered meals.



This grant allows districts to build upon this innovation, especially now as COVID-19 continues to exacerbate food insecurity rates in children. This grant supports the unique farm to school programming needs of CT communities including early care and education settings. In addition, the administration of the grant program prioritizes equity by allowing the state's alliance districts and those that administer school readiness programs a greater opportunity for funding.

Furthermore, a **CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program works to counteract the marketing of unhealthy, processed food that surrounds children and negatively affects their diet and health.** Exposure to food marketing increases calories consumed, preferences for unhealthy product categories, and perceptions of product healthfulness. A recent Rudd Center analysis of Nielsen advertising data revealed food, beverage and restaurant companies spend almost \$14 billion per year on advertising in the United States. More than 80% of this advertising promotes fast food, sugary drinks, candy, and unhealthy snacks, dwarfing the entire \$1 billion budget for all chronic disease prevention and health promotion at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Our research also shows that food companies target children, teens and communities of color with marketing for their least healthy products.

Thank you for raising these timely bills. We urge the Committee's support of the amended language for HB 6617. If you have questions regarding my testimony, you can contact me at sally.mancini@uconn.edu.

¹ Muth ND, Dietz WH, Magge SN, Johnson RK (2019). American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement. Public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 143(4).

² Powell ES, Smith-Taillie LP, Popkin BM (2016). Added sugars intake across the distribution of US children and adult consumers: 1977-2012. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 116(10), 1543-1550.

³ Malik VS, Hu FB (2019). Sugar-sweetened beverages and cardiometabolic health: an update of the evidence. *Nutrients*, 11(8), 1840.

⁴ 7 *CFR*, Section 210.10(a)(1)(i) and 7 *CFR*, Section 220.8(a)(1)

⁵ Connolly, K., Babbitt, M. I., McKee, S. L., McGinn, K., Cohen, J. FW, Chafouleas, S. M., & Schwartz, M. B. (2021). Dedication, innovation, and collaboration: A mixed-methods analysis of school meals in Connecticut during COVID-19. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2021.102.020>