

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

My name is Paul McComiskey. I am a Cafeteria Chef for the New London Public School District. 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.

Creating a direct link between the youth that reside in this community and the local food producers just outside their orbit provides an invaluable resource in education, nutrition and food security. Before joining the Childhood Nutrition Program (CNP) for the New London School District I worked at the Ocean House Hotel and Resort as the Food Forager and Director of Culinary Education. It was there that I had the privilege and honor of directly connecting guests and Chefs to the bounty of locally grown and produced food from our independent New England farmers.

Farmers are stewards of the land and of the earth. They take their job and that responsibility very seriously. They are also natural educators, informing their community on a variety of health and ecological benefits through the production and consumption of responsibly farmed, local food. I can not think of any better resource for co-education on the subject of food and natural sciences.

Partnering with Brigaid The New London CNP started an initiative to provide scratch cooked nutritionally dense food to all the students in the school district, there by elevating the quality and health benefits of "school food". Over the past few years, I, along with other professional chefs have trained and guided other food service workers through the transition from pre-packaged, frozen, preservative laden meals; to fresh produce cut daily, flavoring and cooking raw protein and making stocks and sauces from scratch. There was much to learn on both sides. Our hope is that with funding like that of CT Grown for CT kids these shifts will become more predominate statewide. The team from New London CNP is uniquely positioned to both speak to the power of these changes, and to implement and grow our program further. This along with my personal experience interfacing with farmers and local food producers in southern New England, will allow us to take full advantage of this funding, and to spread that knowledge to our statewide colleagues to benefit all the children and families of the state.

Although we currently focus our monthly menus around a handful of staple vegetables, the ability to procure responsibly farmed, in-season food will not only allow us to expose the students to new and flavorful items, but also spark a conversation and imagination that can then be expounded upon in class and at home. Focusing this natural curiosity of children towards food can only further the ability to reach the greater community, enhancing their awareness of a healthy lifestyle through local food culture. When CT Grown for CT Kids is implemented across an entire school district the ripple effect through the community will have positive influences for generations.

Along with the community impact and the health benefits, the educational benefits of this funding will open a new resource for educators. As noted before Farmers are natural teachers and always eager to engage with children, parents and teachers. Once a relationship is established with a local food producer, they become an incalculable resource for hands-on learning. The science behind farming, the economics of farming, the business of farming, the social impact of farming, and the never-ending governmental policy changes that revolve around farming are just a few of the subject's students would have the opportunity to get a first hand look at when schools have the funding to support local farms and food producers.

In conclusion, funding from CT Grown for CT Kids can only prove to elevate the quality of food in schools, the diversity of education to our students and to strengthen community relationships in a fragmented supply line between food and our children's future.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Paul McComiskey
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