

Testimony - Shannon Raider shannonraider@gmail.com

Hello To all Honorable members of this Education Committee Sen McCrory and Rep Sanchez and Good day.

No. 6621 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES. Specifically section 3 CT G 4 CT Kids

My name is Shannon Raider. I am very excited to see this bill before the legislature with all the other important bills being raised in this committee today.. This Connecticut grown for Connecticut kids legislation is not only about **the state CLEARLY saying** we understand and care about the integrity and quality of school meals our children have access to, It also recognizes the vitality of local agricultural relationships in our communities across the state. This bill can serve to Democratize access to local sustainably grown food and unlock resources for food literacy.

I work as an advocate for f2s at PLOYT a statewide f2s program out of UCONNnext. am a parent of new haven public school student, who eats and benefits from universally free lunches , as a once next generation farmerI experienced the difficulty of accessing institutional markets,As an educator who has worked for almost 2 decades to grow food literacy among young people in urban gardens, educational farms and in classrooms, chicken coops and wherever soil and curious hands could meet.

I have seen farm to school across these experiences and this bill would be a significant first step in equitably providing farm to school programing as a universal opportunity. It would also give next generation farmers, including BIPOC farmers a boost in reaching this new and fast growing market. As was mentioned this bill would provide an infusion of dollars for districts to increase direct purchases from farmers paving the way for more effective procurement relationships.

Shortening the distance between our local farms and schools not only brings economic, environmental and educational benefits, it can do so with a sharpened

lens on racial, economic and food equity. The local food movement has been framed as a luxury. The local food movement as it embraces sustainable, organic, fresh, farmers marts and CSA relationships is for those who have the privilege to access it. This has hindered farmers accessing markets and our communities that all benefit from values driven food choices. We see districts across the spectrum going above and beyond to bring local food into the cafeteria. From HARTford to naugatuck mansfield to southington food service directors and their kitchen staff are working above and beyond what they get paid for great success to get local food,. In our program we have over 80 districts sharing a commitment to serve local food. And with no additional funding resources. We hear Food service directors over and over again say they want this. families want this . Our farmers absolutely need access to new and growing markets. And selling to schools is one of the fastest growing markets according to Farm to institution survey in 2017 .

By resourcing and funding local food through our public SCHOOLS with increased procurement dollars, money for educational programming and empowered community collaborations IS a path to democratizing access to this local food economy that is a universal right. Well funded, meaningful state support for Farm to school can be a powerful measure and barometer for Food justice, serving nutritionally and culturally representative foods, empowering next generation and urban farmers .

Others will speak and there is endless research on the benefits of food literacy, relationship to growing food in gardens and visiting farms, nutrition education and the environmental and economic benefits of farm to school. These benefits should not be so hard fought for with scant funding, unequal access to resources across districts and with so much inconsistency.

We know that when the quality of school meals improves, meal counts increase, this means funding for meals increases, which creates a positive feedback loop. Local foods with scratch cooking hands down has been shown to increase the quality and flavor of school meals. Kids respond, their families respond, food services and cafeteria works respond all in a positive feedback loop.

Access to the bounty of CT farms must not be limited to those with the 'privilege to. Democratizing access to local sustainably grown food that support small businesses from seed to plate CAN BE DONE IN OUR school food system. Thank you so much for your time today. And I welcome any comments and questions

When we resource agriculture and education we can better empower farmers and environmental educators that reflect the diversity of the children in our state as well to reflect on that importance so righteous spoken about today!