

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

My name is Krizl Soriano. I am the Board Chair of New Britain ROOTS in New Britain and a Food Corps Alumni who served in East Hartford and Hartford. 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.

Funding is critical to continue work that energizes the school and local community at all levels. Farm-to-school rallies teachers, school food service professionals, and farmers to collaborate on unique opportunities to engage students through new and exciting lessons.

The capacity of farm-to-school programming to invigorate student learning while building resilient local food systems is unparalleled. In my previous experience as a school garden and nutrition educator, hands-on garden, cooking, and lunch room taste-testing activities promote social connection, self-confidence, and learning that extends beyond the classroom. Often, students shared stories about how they managed to recruit their family to try a new recipe or vegetable they first learned in school. Additionally, these lessons create space for students to make cultural connections and celebrate their identities in school. Farm-to-school programs are integral to creating inclusive, safe, and vibrant school environments

CT Grown for CT Kids is our chance to build a strong foundation for the success for the next generation. This funding will increase the resources necessary for schools and organizations like New Britain ROOTS to expand school gardening and cooking programs that teach life skills and create equitable access to the local bounty of quality food. This program is a win-win for people who grow, prepare, and eat food in Connecticut.

Thank you for the consideration and for your service.

Krizl Soriano
West Hartford, CT