

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6854

AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE OFFICE OF THE FOOD ACCESS ADVOCATE
Title: AND TAX INCENTIVES FOR GROCERY STORES IN FOOD DESERTS.

Vote Date: 3/23/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/7/2023

File No.:

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Rep. Hubert D. Delany, 144th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Food insecurity is a reality for many individuals living within the state. Even with the numerous programs that supply families with food services, many individuals may not know what resources are available and struggle with accessing these services. There are communities throughout the state that are considered food deserts leaving individuals without access to healthy foods due to the lack of grocery stores within a reasonable distance from their homes. This bill will not only assist in centralizing resources to families through an Office of Food Access Advocate, but it will also give tax incentives to grocery store owners to build in these areas known as food deserts.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language removes the creation of the Food Access Advocate Office. It requires grocery stores to engage in a labor peace agreement with a bonafide labor organization to be eligible for tax abatement for opening in a food desert.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO); supports this bill stating how food deserts play a critical role in food insecurity. It is suggested that the website which will contain information and data on food access and insecurity be available in multiple languages to allow all individuals the ability to obtain the resources. It is also suggested that community stakeholders and health insurance companies be involved in the conversations surrounding how to incentivize the construction of grocery stores in food deserts and how to have access to healthy foods.

Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner, Andrea Barton Reeves; opposes this bill stating that much of the work the Office of the Food Access Advocate would set to do is already being performed by the agency and partners across the state. It is stated this role would duplicate services and would add another administrative office over DSS' current work. It is also stated these additional resources are not necessary and are not proposed in the Governor's budget.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut General Assembly, State Representative, Hubert Delany; supports this bill stating the importance of having a central office as it will help with assisting and directing state resources toward communities in need and will support local food banks. It is also stated the Office of Food Access Advocate would help improve and oversee the grant application process for local food banks. It is stated that community-led efforts will create a more environmentally sustainable and socially just food system.

ACLU Connecticut, Policy Counsel, Jess Zaccagnino; supports this bill stating this would help black and brown communities who are most affected by food insecurity. It is stated having tax incentives for full-sized grocery stores will benefit these communities and will also create employment opportunities for community members.

Connecticut Academy of Nutrition Dietetics, Public Policy Coordinator, Kerry Coughlin; supports this bill stating it will expand the availability of nutritious food and promote diet quality, food security, and fiscal responsibility.

Connecticut AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorne; supports this bill stating requiring retailers to pay workers involved in the construction of grocery stores a livable wage to receive the tax incentive ensures adherence and compliance to labor standards. It is stated having a central office will increase awareness and coordination of services to address food insecurity. It is suggested that grocery store owners should be required to enter into labor peace agreements (*this was included in substitute language*).

Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Organizer, Angel Serrano; supports this bill stating having a tax incentive help bring grocery stores into communities that are considered food deserts as various communities prefer having a grocery store.

Connecticut State Building Trades Council, Executive Director, Joe Toner; supports this bill stating how important economic development policies are and provisions that ensure

taxpayers' dollars are being used to create jobs should be included. It is suggested that grocery store owners should be required to enter into labor peace agreements (*this was included in substitute language*).

Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA); supports this bill stating how this would help hospitals' efforts to attract health-promoting businesses into communities and enable hospitals to create partnerships to address food insecurity within the state.

End Hunger CT, Policy Director, Lucy Nolan; supports this bill stating many programs in the state assist individuals and are administered by several agencies. It is stated that community-based organizations also work with one another, but there is no coordination, therefore, having an Office of the Food Access Advocate will allow centralization. It is stated food deserts can be an economic hardship and access to larger grocery stores within these communities will be beneficial in the long term.

Center for Food Equity and Economic Development, Director, Nic Tedesco; supports this bill stating how essential it is to address food insecurity and hunger within the state and how infrastructure must be built to support these causes.

The Foodshed Network, Founder, Ali Ghiorse; supports this bill stating a centralized body would address systemic barriers and assure that vulnerable residents have the care and attention they need to feed themselves and their families. It is stated the Office of the Food Access Advocate can also work with local farmers to provide resources to grow more food and connect with local communities, grocery stores, farmers' markets, and food pantries.

Foundation for Fair Contracting, Director, Kimberly Glassman; supports this bill stating requiring contractors to pay construction workers a fair wage to receive tax incentives is common sense policy and protects a worker's wage. It is suggested that grocery store owners should be required to enter into labor peace agreements as it will create sustainable jobs in the community (*this was included in substitute language*).

Green Village Initiative, Executive Director, Ellie Angerame; supports this bill stating access to healthy nutritious foods impacts learning outcomes. It is stated the Office of Food Access Advocate can be a step in the right direction that may allow opportunities for future generations to flourish.

Hartford Foundation, Senior Public Policy Officer, Chris Senecal; supports this bill stating data shows that low-income residents in urban communities are the most vulnerable to not having access to healthy foods. It is stated the lack of adequate transportation and the rising cost of food continues to make food insecurity a challenge in Hartford and other urban communities across the state. It is stated for the past five years, the Hartford Foundation has been working with the city of Hartford and other organizations to address Hartford's food deserts and the impact it has on the health of residents living in those neighborhoods. It is stated that even though residents did express a need for a grocery store, there is still no supermarket construction planned, therefore, proposing to offer tax incentives to grocery stores is a useful tool for creating access to healthy foods.

The following individuals have submitted testimony in support of this bill. It is stated communities would benefit from the food rescues and food pantries in and around low-

income communities. However, many working families are not knowledgeable about the resource's food in their communities. Having a centralized office would help get resources to people who need them the most.

PT Partners, Member, Maribel Betances

PT Partners, Member, Lillian Caraballo

PT Partners, Member, Dione Dwyer

PT Partners, Member, Neighbor Relations Support Staff, Di-zett Hamilton

PT Partners, Member, Resident Leader-Assistant Admin, Zenida Gonzalez

PT Partners, Member, Lucy Machado

PT Partners, Member, Brenda Medina

PT Partners, Member, Evelyn Medina

Real Food CT, Executive Director, Sean Fitzpatrick; supports this bill stating there is a need for an Office of Food Access Advocate that is dedicated to networking, research, collaboration, and providing up-to-date information to residents and combating food insecurity.

Renew New England, Organizing Director, Mariana Pelaez; supports this bill stating food access is one of the most important issues that need to be fixed and the state must invest resources in combating food insecurity.

Sierra Club, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Ann Gadwah; supports this bill stating food insecurity crisis is disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. It is stated food access is a human right and until these inequities aren't addressed, then the current problems will not be solved. It is also stated having a database of food insecurity information will be helping in constructing a plan to address food insecurity while also being a resource for those looking for healthy foods.

The following individuals have submitted testimony in support of this bill. It is stated they have partnered with local organizations in their community to combat food insecurity. It is stated the creation of the Office of Food Access Advocate will improve infrastructure and ease resource availability within the community.

Trumbull Sustainable Youth, Founding Member, Brianna Jackson

Trumbull Sustainable Youth, Member, Mary Isaac

Trumbull Sustainable Youth, Member, Mari Jackson

Trumbull Sustainable Youth, Member, April Lang

Trumbull Sustainable Youth, Member, Kevin Malone

Trumbull Sustainable Youth, Member, Pam Roman

UFCW Local 371, Executive Vice President, Keri Hoehne; supports this bill stating this food access and safety are important issues to address. It is stated that when public dollars are being used for public goods, then maximum benefits should come out of this arrangement. It is suggested that grocery store owners should be required to enter into labor peace agreements as it will create sustainable jobs in the community (*this was included in substitute language*).

UFCW Local 919, Organizing Director, Emily Sabo; supports this bill stating this food access and safety are important issues to address. It is stated requiring developers to pay construction workers a livable wage to receive the tax incentive for the construction of grocery stores ensures adherence and compliance with labor standards. It is suggested that grocery store owners should be required to enter into labor peace agreements as it will create sustainable jobs in the community (*this was included in substitute language*).

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, State Legislative Representative, AJ Clayborne; supports this bill as it will ease the economic and public health challenges food deserts have on communities. It is suggested that grocery store owners should be required to enter into labor peace agreements as a condition to receive tax incentives as it will create sustainable jobs in the community (*this was included in substitute language*). It is stated that a labor peace agreement is not a mandate for unionization as it is an agreement between the employer and the labor organization.

Wilton Go Green, President, Tammy Thornton; supports this bill stating food insecurity and food waste are solvable problems if proper resources and support services are provided by the state.

Connecticut Resident, Ashford, Janet Bellamy; supports this bill stating the importance of children receiving good nutrition and the benefits it has on their ability to concentrate and have mental clarity. It is stated families deserve access to healthy foods within their communities.

Connecticut Resident, Nancy Bowden; supports this bill stating this will bring increased attention to combatting food insecurity. It is suggested that the Office of the Food Access Advocate analyzes the root cause of hunger in the state to determine a plan that would end hung permanently.

Connecticut Resident, West Hartford, Melissa Cyr; supports this bill stating has seen how residents have dealt with food insecurity over the years through volunteering. It is stated various community projects would benefit greatly from more support and funding and having a central office can direct those who need resources within the community.

Connecticut Resident, Ashford, Susan Eastwood; supports this bill stating there is a real problem in Connecticut with food insecurity and establishing a centralized body to combat food insecurity would improve access to healthy foods which would make an impact on the health of individuals within the community.

Connecticut Resident, Tagan Engel; supports this bill stating no one in this state should go hungry. It is stated by fixing the issue of lack of access to food within communities will help individuals get out of poverty and have healthy food to live a high quality of life.

Connecticut Resident, Mary Hogue; supports this bill stating it is the responsibility of our state to ensure that residents get the nutrition they need.

Connecticut Resident, Chelsea Kordiak; supports this bill stating the importance of making food accessible and reducing food waste.

Connecticut Resident, New Haven, Eluned Li; supports this bill stating children in the state are facing hunger, malnutrition, and lifelong health conditions due to the lack of access to healthy and nutritious foods. It is stated the Office of the Food Access Advocate would create a centralized body that would help connect the community with the resource and information to combat food insecurity.

Connecticut Resident, Bridgeport, Lismari Martorony; supports this bill stating emergency benefits from the pandemic are ending and families are struggling to afford basic needs. It is stated that while families currently benefit from the use of food pantries, having a centralized office will address food insecurity and there will be an increase in access to resources.

Connecticut Resident, Stamford, Elsa Mekonen; supports this bill stating the Office of Food Access Advocate will require a full staff along with appropriate funding to achieve the objectives and authority to enforce new policies state-wide.

Connecticut Resident, Jessica Norman; supports this bill stating that while the community tries to help residents out, the needs are always met. It is stated there has been a rise in community fridges but having a standard collaboration across would improve access to those living in the most vulnerable communities.

Connecticut Resident, Brookfield, Heather Peracchio; supports this bill stating the creation of the Office of the Food Access Advocate would benefit the many residents that are facing food insecurity and are unclear about the support that is available to them.

Connecticut Resident, Olivia Rinkes; supports this bill stating the state's urban populations and large numbers of individual communities are affected by food insecurity and exposed to harmful environmental damages due to proximity to large industrial waste facilities. It is stated tracking food waste and working to reduce food waste by groceries stores will address environmental issues of food products being thrown into landfills and adding to environmental damages.

Connecticut Resident, Briana Wahl; supports this bill stating many children and families are without the basic nutrients to feed and nourish their bodies. It is stated food insecurity became a growing issue during the pandemic and remains a growing issue with the increases in inflation and the cost of groceries. It is stated having an Office of the Food Advocate at the state level means eradicating food insecurity for vulnerable populations in Connecticut.

Connecticut Resident, Joseph Weish; supports this bill stating healthy food and access to it produces healthy people and communities and the state can solve its food insecurity problem. It is stated farmers and growers will have new opportunities.

One person submitted testimony anonymously in support of this bill. It is stated food access is an individual's right, not a privilege. It is stated one should have to wait hours for a bus or walk far to the grocery store. It is stated having a centralized office would help with food advocacy and access to alleviate food insecurities in the state.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None stated.

NATURE AND SOURCES GENERAL COMMENTS:

CT Food Association, President, Wayne Pesce; supports having tax incentives for the construction of grocery stores in food deserts as it will increase access to healthy foods and will create jobs within these communities. It is stated the creation of the Office of the Food Access Advocate will add value and question the cost-effectiveness of this initiative. It is suggested this funding be used to increase SNAP outreach and funding, permanently fund free school meals for children, increase funding that allows the purchase of healthy foods from farmers, and increase funding for 2-1-1.

Connecticut Foodshare, President, Jason Jakubowski; supports having tax incentives for the construction of grocery stores in food deserts as it will increase access to healthy foods and will create jobs within these communities. It is stated as a direct-service provider, the creation of the Office of the Food Access Advocate is not a good use of tax dollars and would add to government bureaucracy. It is suggested that the funding goes into existing programs and services that state agencies already administer.

Reported by: Kelly Houston

Date: April 6, 2023