

Committee on Children JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-929

AN ACT EXPANDING SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE FREE

Title: SCHOOL MEALS TO ALL STUDENTS.

Vote Date: 2/28/2023

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/7/2023

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Committee on Children.

COSPONSORS OF BILL:

Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.

Rep. Marcus Brown, 127th Dist.

Rep. Kadeem Roberts, 137th Dist.

Rep. Gary A. Turco, 27th Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to provide free school meals to students across the state of Connecticut. This bill assures that no Board of Education may charge a student for school breakfast, lunch, or other child feeding.

This bill [SB 929] provides school meals to children operating similarly to that of the COVID-19 health emergency that authorized free school meals. The goal of this bill seeks to alleviate food scarcity amongst our state students where we've seen a considerable decrease in school meal participation.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

State of Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate, Acting Child Advocate, Sarah Healy Eagan, strongly supports the bill and reminds that there are few sounder polices than making sure that children are well fed and have enough to eat. Children in our own towns continue to

go hungry and that is an avoidable travesty. They also add that children of undocumented parents may not be eligible for many supports, and this would alleviate some of that stress. They urge the passage of this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Plainville School District, Business Manager, Sam Alderstein, supports this bill and urges the passage with the necessary funding.

New England Dairy & Food Council, Sr. Manager, School Nutrition, Amanda Aldred, RD, SNS, supports this bill and its positive contribution it would have to improving nutrition, supporting student success, and addressing food insecurity.

United Way of Western Connecticut, President, Isabel Almeida, supports this bill and effort it would make in relieving more than 131,000 children facing food insecurity.

East Hampton Public Schools, School Business Manager, Karen Asetta, supports this bill and the return to free school meals for all students enrolled in Connecticut Schools participating in the USDA National School Lunch Program.

Central Connecticut Coast YMCA, Timothy Bartlett, supports this bill and mentions that free school meals cause less absenteeism and more focus.

Yeshiva Ateres Shmul of Waterbury, Mrs. C Bassman, strongly supports this bill and mentions that although many of her students don't qualify for free or reduced lunch, they still receive scholarships to attend as their families continue to struggle with rising costs.

Beckett Farms, LLC, Owner, Chip Beckett, supports this bill and its allowance of direct sales to schools and other institutions. This would support state economy.

Northwest CT YMCA, CEO, Greg Brisco, supports this bill and adds that children eating lunch is a key part of keeping our kids healthy and happy.

Cromwell High School, Food Service Manager, Lisa Cacace, supports this bill as it gives kids the ability to eat lunch and not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from.

Guildford Public Schools, Food Service Director, Janet Calebro, supports this bill and reminds that she has dedicated her life to feeding children and that the COVID pandemic has taught us valuable lessons.

Plainfield Community Schools, Director of Food and Nutrition Services, Ashley Carl, RDN, CDN, supports this bill and commends the goal of feeding children healthy and delicious meals every day.

United Way of Connecticut, Senior Vice President, Amy Casavina Hall, supports this bill and its goal of feeding all children across our state. She adds that even students who are perceived to be in wealthier locations still struggle with food insecurity.

Connecticut Alliance of YMCAs, VP Government Relations, John L. Cattelan, supports this bill and believes that free school meals for the children of our state is vitally important.

EdAdvance, Food Service Manager, Joanne Cimino, supports this bill and reminds that many of the children she serves every day; lunch is the only meal they eat.

EdAdvance, Assistant Food Services Director, Joanne Kirchner-Macri, supports this bill and adds that we mandate children go to school but do not provide meals for them. Children are often excited for school on Mondays just because they know they will get a meal they otherwise couldn't afford.

FoodCorps, Northeast Policy Director, Dawn Crayco, supports this bill and recommends continued support in farm to school efforts. Recommends the following:

- Permanently funding ARPA funded CT Grown for CT Kids Grants.
- Establish CT Local Food for Schools Incentive Program, to incentivize schools to purchase from local food vendors.

Nourish My Soul, Executive Director, AnaAlicia Cruz, supports this bill and believes that access to nutritious and healthy foods is a basic right for every human being. She also encourages food and nutrition education for students.

Root2Rise, Melissa Cyr, supports this bill and adds that nutritious and locally sourced food for our children makes sense, and that the discontinuation of the program does a disservice to our state.

Connecticut Education Association, Vice President, Joslyn DeLancey, supports this bill and reminds that many students silently go hungry between classes and that a nutritious lunch should be provided for every student of our state.

Montville School District, Food Service Director, Carol Dodson, supports this bill and adds that students on free or reduced lunch face stigma, and when students can all receive lunch free of charge it reduces the stigma and shame the child might feel.

Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Executive Vice President for Community Child Health, Paul Dworkin, MD, supports this bill and believes that the challenges of COVID-19 public health emergency allow state leaders to think bolder, and that they should prioritize initiatives like free school meals.

Cold Spring Farm, Victoria Fielding, supports this bill and specifically advocates for the farm to School initiatives. She adds that it may not be the cheapest option but making sure our children are fed healthy foods while supporting our local farms is something we cannot ignore.

Sierra Club Connecticut, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Ann Gadwah, supports this bill and its work to address food scarcity among our school children. They remind that during the

pandemic all students received free lunch and that every child has the right to live healthy and safe lives.

The Foodshed Network, Founder, Ali Ghiorse, supports this bill and encourages that no cost school meals help foster a positive environment where children can share meals and enjoy the pleasure of eating.

Middlesex Coalition for Children, Executive Director, Izzi Greenberg, supports this bill and urges that we had already experienced the success of what the program can be and to not let funding limitations get in the way of doing what is right for our kids.

Ellington Public Schools, Director of Finance, Brian Greenleaf, supports this bill and recognizes the clear data that shows the benefits of free school meals. However, they recommend that the bill allow for a choice among boards of education to opt into providing school meals for free contingent on necessary support from the State.

School and State Finance Project, Executive Director, Lisa Hammersley, supports this bill and reminds that the data in CT is consistent: one in five children are “not confident about their next meal.” This legislation would transform childhoods for the many children across our state.

Tolland Public Schools, Director of Food & Nutrition Services, Abby Kassman-Harned, supports this bill and believes every student should have the opportunity to a free meal just like a computer or a ride on the bus. Students should have all the resources they need to succeed.

United Way of Greater New Haven, President & CEO, Jenifer Heath, supports this bill and that the ALICE data proves the need for universal student lunch especially for those who are “invisible but hungry,” the children who make just enough to not qualify for assistance but still too little to afford rising costs.

EO Smith High School, PE Department, Earl Henrichon, supports this bill and believes we should be doing everything we can to support our students.

Waterford Foodservice, Director, Dianne Houlihan, supports this bill and believes no student should have to bear the weight of going hungry. They see students go hungry every day and urge the right thing to do is pass this bill.

Connecticut Food System Alliance, Coordinator, Meg Hourigan, supports this bill and urges Connecticut to implement universal school meals to alleviate the hunger and inequality in our wealthy state.

Clinton PTA, President, Monique Hunter, supports this bill and its ability to greatly expand the support to families across the state.

Connecticut Foodshare, President & CEO, Jason Jakubowski, supports this bill and reiterates that when children are able to eat and have a space to grow, they become better versions of

themselves. They add that their child had been using her lunch card to buy meals for other students, while admirable, a 14-year-old shouldn't have to bear that responsibility.

Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics, RD, Allison Kallberg, supports this bill and urges that the children of Connecticut should have equitable access to quality nutrition and quality.

East Hampton Public Schools, School Nurse Supervisor, Beth Kelpen, supports this bill and notes that the high school cafeteria saw an almost 75% drop in students accessing meals. They add that when students don't eat, they get headaches, lethargy, and become more irritable and less attentive.

Northwestern CT Community College, Erin Kennedy, supports this bill and reminds that many student's families make just above to qualify for free or reduced and this brings about greater hunger and inequality. Free school meals for all would solve this issue.

Willington Public Schools, Food Services Director, Stephanie Knight, supports this bill and adds that our students need to know that we are there for them. Universal school meals improve student performance, student nutrition, reduces family economic stress, and overall supports our local businesses and farms. It is time we "fuel our future."

Trumbull Food Services, Kitchen Manager, Tashua School, Sue Kriewald, supports this bill, they provide that of the 9 schools in Trumbull, a 50% reduction in breakfast and lunches has occurred. They add that they are a non-profit and provide high-quality food to the students, and like many other costs have risen immensely. This bill would help them to continue to provide good food while serving those who need it the most.

Naugatuck YMCA, CEO, Mark LaFortune, supports this bill with costs continuing to rise we see with no-cost meals that students develop less absenteeism, and more focus. The cafeteria fosters a safe community where every student should be able to eat and enjoy their food.

Plainville Community Schools, Superintendent of Schools, Steven LePage, supports this bill and gives [extensive comment](#) and background on no-cost school meals. They hope the legislature acts to extend universal free meals and sees little other issues with higher priority. Free meals for all are an investment and carries a high return for our society.

Coventry High School, Manager, Lynn Levasseur, supports this bill and points out the drastic increase in students not eating breakfast or lunch served at the cafeteria now that no-cost meals were eliminated. Students should not be worrying about their next meal or their student lunch debt but what college they want to go to or striving to get good grades. Before they were feeding over 300 students a day, now they serve roughly 130 on a good day.

CT American Academy of Pediatrics Chapter, Chair, Advocacy Committee, Molly Markowitz, supports this bill and adds that food scarcity does not affect everyone the same, due to historical inequities black and brown children across Connecticut face food inequity at a higher level, and even more scarcity of having access to healthy food. Universal access is a critical action that must be taken.

Middletown Public Schools, Food and Nutrition Manager, Randall Mel, supports this bill and Child Nutrition programs have continued to work endlessly to support a sustainable learning environment where students of any background can learn and not feel that weight or stigma between them, their colleagues, and nutritious foods.

Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, Childrens Policy Analyst, Thomas Nuccio, supports this bill and the continuance of the no-cost meals program. This program would be positively impactful on the wellbeing on Connecticut's public-school students.

End Hunger Connecticut, Policy Director, Lucy Nolan, supports this bill and adds that twenty-four states also have legislation to reinstate permanent universal school meals. Maine, California, and Colorado continued the program permanently. They give additional language changes to increase Farm to School Participation. They give many other indications of successful implementation of the program.

Old Saybrook Public Schools, Director of Food Services, Maureen Nuzzo, supports this bill and believes that this bill would positively assist families facing economic hardship that so are many are currently facing.

School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, President, Erin Perpetua, supports this bill and hopes that Governor Lamont will take the necessary steps to appropriate the funds needed to implement this program.

Southington-Cheshire Community YMCAs, Chief Executive Officer, Mark Pooler, supports this bill and urges the passage as eating a healthy lunch is a key part of staying healthy, happy and successful in school.

Stamford Cradle to Career, President, Edith Presley, supports this bill and reminds that with this legislation there is an opportunity to make immediate change in so many hungry children's life's', regardless of where they live or what school they may attend.

Connecticut Association of Public-School Superintendents, Executive Director, Fran Rabinowitz, supports this bill and the goals this legislation seeks to relieve. They are aware that many school districts will not be in the position to fund this bill. They urge policymakers to dedicate state resources needed to continue this important program.

- Montvill Public Schools, Food Service Manager, Kimberly Reynolds,
- Plainville Community Schools, Kitchen Manager, Tina Ross
- Cromwell Public Schools, Food and Nutrition Coordinator, Sandra Shaw,
- Branford Public Schools, Food Service Director, John Turenne,
- Southington Board of Education, School Food Service Director, Nya Welinsky,

Supports this bill and believes that every student should have access to no-cost meals. Students that go hungry continue to face struggles in school with attendance, focus and behavior. Universal school lunch would help so many students across our state.

- CABE and Portland BOE, VP for Government Relations, Meg Scata,
- Hartford Foundation, Sr. Public Policy Officer, Chis Senecal,
- Valley Shore YMCA, CEO, Anthony Sharillo,
- UW of SE Connecticut, VP, Anne Stockton,
- Thurston Foods Inc., Education Sales Department Head, Timothy J. Thurston,
- Willington Public Schools, Principal, Mary Kay Tshonas,
- ACLU CT, Policy Council, Jess Zaccagnino,
- American Heart Association, CT Government Relations Director, Jim Williams,
- Sierra Club Connecticut, Advocacy and Outreach Organizer, Ann Gadwah,

Supports this bill and the ambitious goal of providing universal no-cost school meals to children across the state. When students are healthy and fed, they can focus and perform better in school.

- 15 anonymous people submitted support for SB 929.
- Sabrina Aldrich,
- Emily Asklar,
- Patrice Barrett MPH,
- Daryl Basch,
- Jason Beach,
- Kate Bender,
- Patricia Borba,
- Kara Bracero,
- Julia Buzay,
- Debra Cahill,
- Christine Caruso,
- Crystal Carvalho,
- April Cashin,
- Noah Cline,
- Theresa Donatelli,
- Laura Dow, Special Education Teacher,
- Laurence Edawrdsm PhD,
- Karen Edwards, MD-MPH,
- Joanna Eichner,
- Kelly F,
- Brenda Falusi,
- Tim Gabriele,
- Alyson Gaylord,
- Amanda Glover,
- Joseph Holloway,
- Jessica Hoyt,
- Austen Hunter,
- Julianna Iacovelli,

- Jennifer Jacobsen,
- Kristen Keska,
- Robin Klug,
- Sara Labowe, RD-CD-N,
- Francesca Liscidini,
- Loralee Magoveny,
- Barbara Mellone,
- Paolyn Meza, Pediatrician,
- Stefano Middei,
- Andrea Montovani,
- Lindsay Murphy,
- Lauren Nolan,
- Fatma Pakdil,
- Jennifer Palma,
- Audra Panciera,
- Julia Parera,
- Mariana Pelaez,
- John Pesce,
- Amy Pinaud,
- Dr. Nancy Presnick,
- Shannon Raider,
- Luke Ruchalski,
- Nina Ruckes, MPH-RDN,
- Dr. Sydney Sherman,
- Neil Shilansky,
- Claire Sickinger,
- Jeff Sidewater,
- Jessica Stanger,
- Michelle V,
- Tom Wall,
- Svetlana Wasserman,
- Samantha Webb,
- Pines Wenzel,
- Debr Cahill,
- Jekky Caisse,
- April Cashin,
- Brenda Falusi,
- Amy Pinaud,

Supports SB 929 and its goal of providing no-cost universal free meals to students across the state of Connecticut.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

CASBO, Director of Government Affairs, David Lenihan, comments that although the goal is commendable, the bill as written does little but provide an unfunded mandate that puts undue burden on the schools. They add that if this bill were to become law the state must provide funding.

Somers Public Schools, Director of Business Services, Stephanie Levin, opposes this bill and although supports feeding students' healthy meals. The bill as written creates a huge economic burden on the Somers Public School district. They add as a district that does not depend on state or federal funding, they are looking at a minimum of \$500,000 with nothing to offset that expense.

Southington Public Schools, Director of Business and Finance, Jennifer Mellitt, comments that the state avoid placing further burdens on the Board of Education's operation budget. Their current budget proposal is already 6.28% higher than the current year. They urge to fund any return to universal free meals without placing burdens on struggling board of educations.

Reported by: Christian Talarski

Date: 3/14/23