

# Appropriations Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-1216

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR STUDENT MEALS.

**Vote Date:** 4/20/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/28/2023

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Appropriations Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

This bill would require the Departments of Education, Public Health, and Education to study the need of students statewide to receive free meals in schools and the cost of providing free meals. Data has shown the benefits in providing meals in school settings, including increases in academic performance, student mental and behavioral health, a general sense of wellbeing, higher attendance rates, and improved retention rates. In addition, providing free meals to all reduces the stigma felt by lower income students, thereby increasing the participation rate among the most vulnerable students.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

[Charlene Tucker, Commissioner, CT State Department of Education:](#) Commissioner Russell Tucker submitted written testimony, which spoke of the extensive research already done on the benefits of free school meals, including an exhaustive analyses by CSDE of the costs of providing one school breakfast and one school lunch meal through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program per student per day in Connecticut. She wrote that the cost estimates for school meals are multivariate and fluctuate. Factors that impact the cost estimates include, but are not limited to: changing demographics, enrollment, attendance, student food preferences, supply chain, changes to the federal per meal reimbursement rates as published in the Federal Register annually, holidays, breaks, shortened school days, a school's determination as severe-need (which receives higher federal reimbursement rates), if a student is a foster child, homeless, or runaway, and household participation in other means-tested benefits programs like; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Family Assistance, Husky A.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker shared that the Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs does not currently collect family income data. If the department was required to do such data collection in order to analyze data at the family level, she stated that the CSDE would need software to enable the agency to collect that volume of data, sort it and analyze it. She indicated that the same would hold true for information from municipalities. CSDE would need additional staff and funding for customized software, neither of which were included in the budget.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

### [Sam Alderstein, Director of Business Operations, Plainville Community Schools:](#)

Mr. Alderstein expressed his support for the Meals For All legislation in Connecticut. He believes this initiative will significantly improve children's lives, fostering a healthier society with minimal potential for adverse consequences. He argues that the current school meal system exacerbates hunger-related issues and unhealthy student eating habits. Mr. Alderstein highlighted the substantial increase in the number of students eating school breakfasts in Plainville since just before the pandemic, which he considers transformational. He fears that without Meals For All, the program might revert to its pre-pandemic state, negatively impacting children and society. He further stated that, while many public school administrators share his opinions, he believes there needs to be more clarity regarding the misconceptions about the proposed legislation, particularly surrounding funding. Mr. Alderstein emphasized the importance of including funding for meals in the budget and urged policymakers to consider the long-lasting positive effects this legislation can have on children's lives, including a better focus in school, reduced stigma, and healthier eating habits.

[Rebecca Ahern, Parent:](#) Rebecca Ahern, a parent of high school and middle school-aged students, emphasizes the importance of solid breakfast and lunch options to fuel children's brains. They acknowledge that many students rely on healthy meals at school, as they may not receive them at home. Rebecca highlights the increased need for free school meals due to the rising costs of groceries and everyday living expenses. Rebecca urges decision-makers to support the provision of free school meals for the children of Connecticut.

[Ranya Alboslani, United Way of Central and Northeastern CT:](#) Ms. Alboslani testified in support of school meals for all in Connecticut. She began by stating that she supports the bill because she grew up in a family that could not afford to feed her properly. She shared that she was not the only one in her situation, as her immigrant friends from similar backgrounds struggled to receive healthy food options. She stated that school breakfast and lunch were the most nutritious meals she received. Ms. Alboslani believes the policymakers need to remember that only some children have the luxury of affording adequate healthy food. She offered several reasons for funding school meals:

- Hungry kids can't learn.
- School meals for all mean that all kids get a nutritious meal that many will not get unless at school - it helps their physical health.
- Funds for education are misspent if the students cannot concentrate and learn or are disruptive in the classroom because they are hungry.

- No-cost school meals for all are an economic driver.
  - Schools support Connecticut's farmers by buying local produce due to steady funding.
  - Consistent funding allows companies that supply food to buy more food and hire workers.

[Amanda Aldred, Sr. Manager, School Nutrition, New England Dairy and Food Council](#): Ms. Aldred submitted testimony on behalf of the Council. In her testimony she stated that The New England Dairy & Food Council support school meal programs for their role in decreasing food insecurity and ensuring children have access to balanced, nutrient-rich meals. She emphasized the importance of school meals in addressing food insecurity, improving nutrition, and supporting student success. Further, her testimony offered that school meals are the country's second-largest food assistance program. Studies show that universal free school meals are associated with increased meal participation, improved diet quality, reduced food insecurity, and better academic performance. There are links between nutrition and physical health, behavioral health, cognitive performance, and academic achievement for children and adolescents. Food insecurity and malnutrition can cause social, emotional, and educational problems. Ms. Aldred stated that school meals can dramatically change the lives of kids living with hunger, both now and in the future. On behalf of the New England Dairy & Food Council, she urged the state to continue to support school meal programs and to make them available to all students.

[Isabel Almeida, President, United Way of Western CT](#): Ms. Almeida submitted testimony in support of no-cost school meals for all, which her organization believes promotes student academic success and provides "tangible financial relief to Connecticut families". Her testimony addressed the work being done to support ALICE® (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households to help ensure that they have every opportunity to succeed and thrive in Connecticut. She wrote that ALICE families make more than the federal poverty limit but not enough to afford basic necessities like housing, food, childcare, healthcare, transportation, etc. Across Connecticut, nearly 40% of households live at or below the ALICE threshold. The economic reality of Connecticut families is that a family of four—two adults with an infant and a preschooler—needs to earn over \$110,000 annually to afford the basic cost of living as defined in the ALICE Survival Budget. School meals are a critical support for ALICE families. In the fall of 2021, 41% of Connecticut ALICE households with children experienced food insecurity, and today, more than 50% earn too much to qualify for food support, such as free and reduced-price school meals and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Ms. Almeida shared that in the current school year, when meals were no longer free for all students, meal counts dropped dramatically. Many students eligible for free and reduced-price meals stopped eating at school, preferring to go hungry rather than be identified as food insecure. She believes that school meals should be a universal benefit like desks or textbooks, and that no-cost school meals level the playing field for all students, promoting equity and inclusion. Ms. Almeida wrote that households of color in the state are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and hunger, with more than half living below the ALICE threshold. Studies show a direct link between access to universal school meals and improved academic performance, attendance, and classroom behavior. Kids feel safer in school when meals are universally available. The risk of obesity is lower, especially for

children in poverty. No-cost meals leverage our schools' efficient and effective existing infrastructure to advance education, bolster families' financial stability, and actively work to reduce economic and racial disparities.

[Linda Arpino, President-Elect, CT Academy of Nutrition](#): Linda Arpino, submitted testimony in support of free school meals for all Connecticut students. In her testimony she noted that when meals were no longer free, school meal counts dropped dramatically. Further, she wrote that free school meals remove the stigma associated with receiving food assistance and help students focus on learning. Ms. Arpino pointed out that consistent funding for school meals benefits Connecticut farmers, local workers, and food suppliers while alleviating the burden of rising food costs for families. Providing well-balanced, nutrient-dense meals can lower healthcare costs by preventing obesity and other health issues among young people. She urged the committee to support this crucial program for the success of students and their families.

[Karen Asetta, School Business Manager, East Hampton Public Schools](#): Ms. Asetta, urged support for the continuation of free school meals for all students in Connecticut schools participating in the USDA National School Lunch Program. She stated that the uncertainty of funding has confused families and caused a significant drop in the number of students eating school meals, especially among those who qualify for free or reduced meals due to the fear of stigma. She added that declines in nutrition revenue have led to cost reductions, including food purchases, and trimming staff, impacting the dedicated cafeteria workers who provided meals during the pandemic. The funding shortage will increase the financial demand on local taxpayers as federal pandemic rescue funding expires. Ms. Asetta request support for expanding free school meals to all Connecticut students to rectify this issue.

[Patrice Barrett, Masters of Public Health, Middletown](#): Patrice Barrett urged committee members to fund universal free lunch and breakfast for all school children. She wrote that she has witnessed children arriving at school without eating food that morning and students who do not have fresh fruits at home because their families cannot afford them. These needs are most important in summer school programs, where students readily eat all the breakfast and lunch foods provided. Ms. Barrett noted that families with food insecurity may not be "obvious" to staff and that the food insecurity issue will become more marked with the end of the increased SNAP benefits given during COVID.

[Mendi Blue-Paca, President & CEO, Fairfield County Community Foundation](#): Ms. Blue-Paca submitted testimony offering the foundation's strong support of school meals for all children, especially given the rise in food insecurity across the state. She wrote that according to the 2023 Fairfield County Community Wellbeing Index, a higher share of Connecticut residents reported experiencing food insecurity in 2022 (17%) compared to 2021 (10%). This increase reflects the diminishing of pandemic relief programs and was higher for adults with children at home. School meals for all children protect families from economic hardship, reducing their grocery costs and freeing up their resources for other necessities. When all students get school meals, there is less absenteeism, learning is easier, and there isn't any stigma about who can or cannot afford the meal. Critical funding for education, public or philanthropic, is much better spent when students' basic needs are met.

**Jennifer Bove, Nutrition Services Director, East Hampton Public Schools**

Jen Bove, a Registered Dietitian and the Nutrition Services Director for East Hampton Public Schools, writes in opposition to SB 1216, An Act Concerning Funding For School Meals. She argues that universal free school meals are essential for the health and well-being of all students, and that the state should not require a study to prove this. She cites evidence from her district, where participation in school meals dropped by almost 50% when meals were no longer accessible, and where students with documented food insecurity were choosing to go hungry rather than feel like they were different or “less than” if other kids weren't buying meals. She also notes that only 14.5% of households in CT are considered high-income, and many wealthy families send their children to private schools, which don't receive any school meals for all funding. She concludes by urging the Legislature to support universal free school meals for all future school years, to take the worry of how to pay for meals off the tables of families.

The following individuals/organizations offered oral or written testimony that spoke to the benefits of providing free meals to all school children:

[SB-01216 Instructional Coach-Torrington High School-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Bray, June, Retired teacher-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Burkey, Amy-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Cacace, Lisa, Food Service Manager-Cromwell High School-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Calabro, Janet, Food Service Director-Guilford Public Schools-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Casavina Hall, Amy, Senior Vice President-United Way of Connecticut-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 CIANCHETTI, LORI, OFFICE PROFESSIONAL-PLAINVILLE HIGH SCHOOL- Appropriations Committee Public-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Cipriano, Tim, Father-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Claffey, Sarah, Grade 4 Teacher-Macdonough STEM Academy-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Colamonico, Terry, Food service manager-Plainville Community Schools-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Corcoran, Amy, Registered dietitian-University of Connecticut-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Crayco, Dawn, Northeast Policy Director-FoodCorps-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Croft, Amanda, Cafeteria Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Daponte, Alicia, Food Service Director-Plymouth Public Schools-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 David, Vanessa-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 DeLancey, Joslyn, Vice-President-CEA-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 DODSON, CAROL, Food Service Director-MONTVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT- Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Douglas, Gretchen-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Douglas, Gretchen, Free school lunches-East Hampton Memorial School-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Dugan, Michelle-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Ford, Yolande, Senior Director of DEI-United Way of Western CT - SC2C-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Gollan, Mary, USJ SNAP-Ed Grant Manager-University of Saint Joseph-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Graves, Dina, President - CEO-United Way of Southeastern CT-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Green, William-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Gronowski, Kendra, Kitchen Manager-Plainville Community Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Hallisey, Catherine, CT Program Manager-FoodCorps-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Houlihan, Dianne, Director of School Dining-Waterford Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Hoyt, Jessica-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Ibarrola, Brunella, Asst Dir Nutrition Support-Hartford Public Schools-Opposes](#)  
[SB-01216 Jakubowski, Jason, President - CEO-Connecticut Foodshare-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Keating, Amy, RD-CTAcademy Nutrition - Dietetics-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Kelpen, Beth, School Nurse Supervisor-East Hampton Board of Education-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Keska, Kristen, Educator and Parent-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Knox, Tulin, Cafeteria Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Koschmieder, Ernie, Food Service Director-Groton Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Kress, Jill, Dining Service Liaison-Norwalk Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Labowe, Sara, Registered Dietitian-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 MacKenzie, Michelle, Director-Dietetic Internship-University of Saint Joseph-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Maher, Ceci, State Senator-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Markowitz, Molly, Pediatrician-CT AAP Chapter-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 McMillan, Jonie, Office Professional-Mother-Plainville High School-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Mel, Randall, Child Nutrition Director-Middletown Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Mitri, Melissa-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Montovani, Andrea, Assistant Principal-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Nang, Dorrie, Food and Nutrition Coordinator-Forward Food-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Nola, Eriss, Feed Our Kids-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Palma, Jennifer, ELL Specialist-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Pattavina, Carolyn-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Prosinski, Tim, FSD-West Hartford Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Razzaia, Marie, Kitchen Manger-Milford board of Ed-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Reola, Penny, Secretary to the Principal-Plainville High School-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Rodriguez, Brenda, Cafeteria Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Ruckes, Nina, Registered Dietitian-Academy of Nutrition - Dietetics-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Saurez, Tammy, Cafeteria Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Scata, Meg, Portland Board Member -CABE-CABE and Portland BOE-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Scott, Katie-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Shaw, Sandra, Food and Nutrition Coordinator-Cromwell Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Stockton, Anne, Vice President-Gemma Moran UW Food Center-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Tilley, Marayah, Food Service Director-Mansfield Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Trout, Nancy, Pediatrician-Connecticut Children-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Turco, Gary, State Representative-Connecticut General Assembly-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Turenne, John, Director of Dining-Branford Public Schools-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Wade, Douglas, President-Wade-s Dairy Inc.-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Waite, Vanessa, Food service worker-Town of Willington-Supports](#)  
[SB-01216 Watterson, Aimee, Area Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Watterson, Daniel, Regional Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Welinsky, Nya, School food service Director-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Williams, Jim, Government Relations Director-American Heart Association-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Worman, Aimee, Admin Assistant-East Hampton Memorial School-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Yard, Krystal, Cafeteria Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)

[SB-01216 Young, Shawanda, Cafeteria Manager K-12-SLA Management-Supports](#)

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Harold Brown, Taxpayer](#): Mr. Brown submitted his opposition to the bill, stating that he did not want to pay more in taxes to support the free meals program.

[Sarmite Lipovki, Taxpayer](#): Mr. Lipovki submitted his opposition and belief that the free meal program is socialism. He wrote that "It starts with free food, until there is none left. Then you ban books and cancel opposition voices. Then, it's free transgenderist surgeries. What's next? Free schools for illegals who broke the laws we all agreed too! Next, someone will propose free school trips to state monuments? If I have to pay for gas these "students" do too. This is taking away the responsibility and freedom. I love America and anyone with common sense would say no to socialism!!!"

[Darlene Palmier, Taxpayer](#): Ms. Palmier submitted testimony opposing free meals for school children.

[Drake Penders, Taxpayer](#): Mr. Penders submitted testimony opposing free meals for school children.

[Gregory Vumbanko, Taxpayer](#): Mr. Vumbanko submitted testimony in opposition to the free meal program.

### **Nick Aldi, Food Service Director, Manchester Public Schools**

Nick Adi, Food Service Director for Manchester Public Schools, writes in opposition to SB 1216, An Act Concerning Funding For Student Meals. He argues that a study is not needed to determine that students who are well nourished learn better, and that Manchester Public Schools is one of several districts within the state of Connecticut that participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows all students regardless of household income the ability to receive a breakfast and lunch meal at no cost.

### **Sally Bondy, Food Services Coordinator, LEARN, RESC**

Sally Bondy submitted testimony in opposition to SB 1216. She argued that school districts do not need a survey to know that universal free school meals are important, as districts have seen firsthand the importance of providing free school meals for all during the Covid 19

health crisis. She wrote that especially now, with the cost of goods doubling or tripling (and more), feeding students free breakfasts and lunches at school is a straightforward way to help every family to be able to manage the rising costs of groceries and supply chain shortages. Ms. Bondy cited the experience of LEARN, which saw a significant drop in participation in school meals when they were required to start charging for meals again in December 2022. She also noted that switching back and forth between free meals for all and having to set by status is very confusing for parents.

In addition to Mr. Aldi and Ms. Bove, the following individuals/organization submitted testimony in support of funding free meals for all students, but opposed the study called for in the legislation:

SB-01216 anonymous, anonymous, School Nurse-Opposes

SB-01216 Baudoin, Sarah, Registered Dietitian-Opposes

SB-01216 Bondy, Sally, Magnet Coordinator-LEARN-Opposes

SB-01216 Brooks, Cindy, Food Service Director-Opposes

SB-01216 bryan, valerie-Opposes

SB-01216 Bylander, Alexis, Senior Policy Analyst-Food Research - Action Center-Opposes

SB-01216 Carl, Ashley, Food Service Director-Plainville Community Schools-Opposes

SB-01216 Cattelan, John, VP-Government Relations-CT Alliance of YMCAs-Opposes

SB-01216 Coughlin, Kerry, Registered Dietitian-Opposes

SB-01216 De Assuncao, Davide, Food Service Manager-Plainville High School-Opposes

SB-01216 Deason, Stephanie, Food Service Director-Stonington Public Schools-Opposes

SB-01216 Dotson, Teresa, Registered Dietitian-Opposes

SB-01216 Dreher, Margaret, Director of Nutrition Services-SNACT-Opposes

SB-01216 Edwards, Karen, MD MPH-Indivisible Stamford-Opposes

SB-01216 Fielding, Victoria-Opposes

SB-01216 Fox, Mary, Ms-Opposes

SB-01216 Ghiorse, Ali, Founder-The Foodshed Network-Opposes

SB-01216 Grant, Alexander, Invest in the future-Opposes

SB-01216 Handzel, Hailey, Registered Dietitian-Harvest Table Culinary Group-Opposes

SB-01216 Harned, Abby-Opposes

SB-01216 Hoog, Jochum, Reject Socialism-American Patriot-Opposes

SB-01216 Hourigan, Meg, Coordinator-CT Food System Alliance-Opposes

SB-01216 Hughes, Kimberly-Opposes

SB-01216 Ibarrola, Brunella, Asst Dir Nutrition Support-Hartford Public Schools-Opposes

SB-01216 Jackson, Janet, Cafeteria Manager-Meriden Food and Nutrition-Opposes

SB-01216 Kallberg, Allison, RD-CDN-CT AND-Opposes

SB-01216 Knight, Stephanie, Food Services Director-WILLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS-Opposes

SB-01216 Lamont, Oneda, School Counselor-Plainville High School-Opposes

SB-01216 Maffe, Susan, Director of Food Services-Meriden Public Schools-Opposes



SB-01216 Marcello, Monica, Dietitian-RVNAhealth-Opposes  
SB-01216 Markovics, Dana, Child Nutrition Director-Opposes  
SB-01216 Murphy, Kate-Opposes  
SB-01216 Nolan, Lucy, Policy Director-End Hunger CT-Opposes  
SB-01216 Nuzzo, Maureen, Director of Food Services-OldSaybrook Public Schools-Opposes  
SB-01216 Oliva, Joseph, UConn Student-University of Connecticut-Opposes  
SB-01216 Palmier, Darlene, Stop this Wokeness-Taxpaying American-Opposes  
SB-01216 Panciera, Audra-End Hunger CT-Opposes  
SB-01216 Penders, Drake-Proud American Taxpayer-Opposes  
SB-01216 Peracchio, Heather, Registered Dietitian-Opposes  
SB-01216 Perpetua, Erin, Presidents-School Nutrition Assoc of CT-Opposes  
SB-01216 Pratt, Beth, Director of Nutrition Services-Coventry-Andover Public Schools-Opposes  
SB-01216 Roberge, Kristina, Food Service Coordinator-Groton Public Schools-Opposes  
SB-01216 Sanchez, Vilma, RN BSN MS-Opposes  
SB-01216 Scoppetta, Christopher, Food Service Program Coordinator-Capitol Region Education Council-Opposes  
SB-01216 Shilansky, Neil, Teacher-East Hampton Public Schools-Opposes  
SB-01216 Sidewater, Jeff, Co-Chair- SNACT PP-L Committee-School Nutrition Assoc.of CT-Opposes  
SB-01216 Smith, Paul, Superintendent of Schools-East Hampton Public Schools-Opposes  
SB-01216 Startz, Jennifer-Opposes  
SB-01216 Stone, Jessica, Owner-Operator-Cold Spring Farm-Opposes  
SB-01216 Strong, Dawn, Kitchen Manager-East Hampton Public Schools-Opposes  
SB-01216 Thompson, Ashton-Opposes  
SB-01216 Tyrrell, Becky, Food Service Director-EdAdvance-Opposes  
SB-01216 Virga, Debra-Opposes  
SB-01216 Weisenfeld, Ari, Director-CT Office of Agudath Israel-Opposes  
SB-01216 Youssef, Mohsen, Owner-New Generation Bread-Opposes  
SB-01216 Zagors, Nicole, School Gardens-Opposes

**Reported by: James Angelopoulos**

**Date: 4/25/2023**