



**Testimony of Nancy Trout, MD, MPH  
Primary Care Pediatrician & Obesity Medicine Physician, Co-Director of the Start  
Childhood Off Right Program at Connecticut Children's  
to the Public Health Committee regarding  
House Bill 5003- *An Act Concerning Child and Family Nutrition***

**March 18, 2024**

Senator Anwar, Representative McCarthy Vahey, and members of the legislature's Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my support of House Bill 5003 - *An Act Concerning Child and Family Nutrition*.

My name is Dr. Nancy Trout and I am a Primary Care Pediatrician and Public Health Physician at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and Co-Director of the Start Childhood Off Right (SCOR) program. Before commenting on the bill, I want to provide some background about our organization. Connecticut Children's is a nationally recognized, 205-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 3,000 employees and more than 1,300 pediatric experts on our medical staff, we are the only health system in the state dedicated exclusively to the care of children. While we provide access to the most specialized pediatric care, we also know that only about 10% of children's overall health and wellbeing is determined by the access to and quality of the health care services they receive. For this reason, Connecticut Children's Office for Community Child Health works to improve the wide variety of factors that influence a child's health (often referred to as "the social drivers of health") such as housing, transportation, family support services, and food and nutrition.

At Connecticut Children's, more than half of our patients rely on the state's Medicaid program as their source of insurance coverage. As such, we are keenly aware that a family's finances influences their ability to access care and services for their children. All too often, we see families who lack reliable transportation to travel to medical appointments, cannot afford all of their utility bills, or struggle to purchase healthy foods for their family. These factors greatly impact the health of children and their families. I wish to offer my support of HB 5300 because all children and families should have equal access to nutritious foods, no matter their zip codes or income levels. Data from a recent study done in the Connecticut Children's Emergency Department found a food insecurity rate of 40% among families seeking care.

Despite data supporting WIC as one of the nation's most successful and cost-effective nutrition intervention programs supporting positive health outcomes in women and children, WIC is an underutilized program. A recent study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that in 2020, only 46% of those eligible for WIC in Connecticut participated in the program. Leading causes of WIC underuse include lack of program/eligibility awareness and logistical barriers. HB 5003 directs the Departments of Social Services (DSS), Public Health (DPH), and Agriculture (DOAG) to develop and implement a plan for cross enrolling families who rely on the HUSKY program in WIC and in SNAP. The bill also directs DSS, DPH, DOAG, and the Department of Administrative Services to jointly develop a plan for implementation of interagency and cross-program initiatives to increase access to nutrition programs, which may include the creation of a

common application form and common enrollment/referral protocols. This sort of “no wrong door” approach, helps reduce the administrative burden for families who could benefit from these critical safety net programs to improve their nutrition and health.

Broadly speaking, the bill also encourages various state agencies to share data on nutrition programs and enrollment. Data is critically important to help inform and assess continued outreach efforts and opportunities for improvement to better meet the needs of children and families. HB 5003 also directs DPH to create a one page fact sheet on eligibility requirements for WIC and to distribute this resource to pediatric providers and OBGYNs across the state. For busy providers seeing many patients all day long, many of whom identify their own WIC-awareness gaps, having a quick and easy-to-read resource to share with patients is a helpful tool to help educate and inform patients about the resources available to them.

As a primary care and public health pediatrician, I wish to convey my strong support of this legislation and am pleased to see legislators prioritizing food and nutrition assistance programs. So many families in Connecticut are struggling to access and afford healthy and nutritious foods, and this bill will be a strong start in removing some of the administrative obstacles for providers and families for enrollment in health supporting services.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Emily Boushee, Connecticut Children’s Government Relations Manager at [eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org](mailto:eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org).