

**Child Nutrition Reauthorization Listening Session**

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**Testimony of  
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Good day, my name is Lucy Nolan and I am the executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a Connecticut anti-hunger and food security organization. Our focus is on outreach, education and advocacy on the federal food programs, including the Child Nutrition Programs. EHC! has been active in working in Connecticut communities to increase participation specifically in the School Breakfast Program, Summer Nutrition Program, and WIC.

The Child Nutrition Programs have one thing in common with each other – there are no funds for outreach. **Each one of the programs needs outreach monies to increase participation.** Our work in Connecticut has shown that outreach is very significant in increasing participation in the programs. EHC! has been able to award small grants to sponsors of the summer feeding programs to increase participation through incentives to bring children into their sites. For a grant of \$750 sponsors have been able to buy recreation equipment, raffle items, art supplies and books to give away when the children come to eat lunch. Neighbors tell neighbors, friends tell friends and more children come to the sites to be part of the activity. Each site has doubled the number of children they serve, and the site supervisors credit the small “Operation Participation” grants.

Like the Summer Nutrition Program, it is vitally important that there be adequate funding for outreach for these programs. School breakfast is so important to a child’s ability to learn, and to the whole class experience as fed children behave better. In Connecticut, pilot grants were made available to school districts to serve breakfast in the classroom. Two of the three school districts that participated tripled the number of children eating breakfast (those that had a universal feeding plan) and all the districts increased the number of schools that would have in classroom, or during the school day breakfast – in New Britain, not only did they decide to offer during the school day breakfast in ALL the schools in the district, the entire breakfast program will be universal, even though they are not a Provision II district. Obviously, the grants proved how successful the school breakfast program can be in facilitating learning.

These two examples prove that a small outreach tool can have a huge impact on participation in these programs. It is vitally important that we make every effort possible to get more children to use these programs. As the economy becomes tighter more and more families will use these nutrition programs, programs that will help families and children create a better life.

**Create WIC Advisory Boards in each state.** Connecticut has a legislatively mandated WIC Advisory Board. Members include the Senate Chair of the Public Health Committee, WIC administrators, the Department of Public Health, WIC users who are parents, a nutritionist and anti-hunger advocates. The Advisory Board opens lines of communication and gets issues concerning WIC, outreach, food packages, and other issues out in the open and available for discussion. The Connecticut Advisory Board already made a connection with the WIC Program and Food Stamp outreach – often the same population yet connected through separate state departments (Public Health and the Department of Social Services). We have seen the possibilities of advisory board to opening lines of communication and believe that every state should have one.

**Increase funding to the WIC program** so there is a steady ongoing stream of funds for planning purposes, are no waiting lists, an increase the administrative funds for field offices and increase the funds for WIC Farmer’s Market coupons.

**Allow SFSP sponsors to serve three meals a day or two meals and a snack:** Working parents feel more pressure to work two or more jobs, or are putting in longer hours in response to the increased cost of living. Frequently, one or two incomes in a household is not enough to make ends meet, creating the need for all-day park programs and camps. These programs should have the option to receive reimbursement for an additional snack service.

In Hartford, Hartford School Food Services serves breakfast and lunch to kids in summer school daily. There are other year round community programs operating in the same space (later in the day) that receive snacks through HFS during the regular school day. Because of the 2 meal limit, they cannot receive snacks during the summer forcing children to bring snacks or go without if the program budget cannot purchase snacks daily.

**Lengthen the time allotted for meal service,** so large sites can feed all the children in the allotted time.

**Allow SFSP sponsors to utilize the “offer versus serve” menu option** in order to facilitate children receiving a meal even though they may not eat all the required components. Also this reduces waste and allows children to have some self awareness in regards to their food choices.

**Provide funds for outreach:** Underutilization of summer food programs may be attributed largely to a lack of public awareness about the program and an insufficient number of programs. Outreach is necessary in order to expand the program and increase child participation. Current state and county administrative agencies work closely with community partners to expand program access and strategize about outreach efforts, but funds and time are extremely limited. Outreach is a proven, successful method for increasing program participation. EHC! is part of a privately-funded campaign by several Northeastern states has resulted in doubling of meals and children served in their target communities.

Last summer EHC! worked in Middletown conducting grassroots advocacy and collaborating resulting in an increase of 136% meals served (3,755-8857). Efforts included adding sites, additional meals like breakfast, flyering the neighborhood and organizing a summer food press conference with the Mayor and Superintendent. The program is making significant strides in building on this momentum and growing participation once again this summer. Clearly, outreach can benefit more communities like Middletown. Federally-funded outreach activities would surely produce a more uniform message and result in program expansion. If we can produce results in the Northeast, we can do it nationwide!

**Expand the open-site eligibility threshold from areas where 50% of the children are eligible for free or reduced meals to areas where 40% of the children are eligible for free or reduced meals:** Lowering the SFSP open-site eligibility to 40% will allow the Program to serve more children who truly need the program during the summer months. This would help compensate for the fact that school meal applications often do not accurately reflect the economic condition of the surrounding neighborhoods with high concentrations of low-income families Lowering area eligibility to 40% will simplify the program for large city sponsors and allow rural sponsors to serve more areas.

**Reduce the Administrative Burden of CACFP.** Implement the outstanding recommendations of the Paperwork Reduction Report released in February 2007. Restore the 2% audit funding for the state.

**Expand the At-Risk After School Supper pilot to every state.** As families struggle to make ends meet, more and more parents are out of the house. These programs encourage children to eat at a safe place and give them good food – at supper time.

**Add reimbursement for a 3<sup>rd</sup> meal for children in daycare programs.**

**Expand eligibility to CACFP to children 13-18 who live in homeless or domestic violence shelters.**

**Eliminate tiers for reimbursement for CACFP.** This will increase participation in the program as more sponsors due to decreased paperwork and other administrative burdens that have become apparent since the tiered reimbursement system went into effect in 1998.

**Create a universal during the school day School Breakfast Program for all schools** in order to reduce stigma and increase participation by making breakfast part of the school day.

**Increase the per meal reimbursement for a federal Child Nutrition Program:** An overlying theme in child nutrition programs during these tough economic times is the inability for program directors and sponsors to break even on food costs with the current federal reimbursement. Since food operations run on economies of scale, increasing

participation can help relieve the pressure; however outreach staff and time is need to facilitate such efforts-which also cost money. Unfortunately, meal quality is at risk when food operators are required to meet current nutrition recommendations with meager reimbursements and rapidly increases in staple foods.

It is clear that healthier foods are more expensive than those that are not whole grain, fresh, or even taste better. Research has just come out that shows the child obesity rate is slowing down and one of the reasons is that children have less access to junk food and are not eating as much. Connecticut has the strictest beverage policy in the country, only allowing for milk, water and 100% fruit juice to be sold in the schools. While schools may opt in to partake in the healthier food section of the legislation, many have as they are reimbursed an additional 10 cents per school lunch sold in the previous year. This money has gone a long way to increasing the quality of the food. However, with the cost of transportation increasing so much, those dimes per meal are not going as far as they did. It is imperative that meals are reimbursed at a rate in which school food service directors can feed the children nutritious quality food.

**Increasing the per meal reimbursement so that all children at 185% of the FPL and below are able to receive a free breakfast and lunch** is imperative as well. Many families who earn between 130% and 185% of the FPL pay a reduced rate for school meals; yet, they are often the families that do not earn enough to get by on their own and yet are over limit for other programs such as Food Stamps. These families are food insecure and need the meals at school.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today on the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization. As you get along in this process I am sure you will hear many suggestions and ideas, and I am sure we at End Hunger Connecticut! will have more and better ideas! These nutrition programs are successful because they work, they feed kids, they give kids a leg up in their lives – we need to assure that we are doing the best we are able to – for the kids.