

SNACT

School Nutrition Association of Connecticut

2026 End of Legislative Session Report

Public Policy & Legislation Committee

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For the SNACT Board of Directors and PP&L Committee



A Session Defined by Momentum and a Historic Win

The 2026 Connecticut General Assembly — February 4 through May 6 — delivered SNACT's most significant legislative achievement in years: universal free school breakfast, fully funded in the state budget at \$14 million, reaching an estimated 164,000 additional Connecticut students beginning in the next school year. That victory, years in the making, did not arrive by accident. It was the product of sustained, coordinated advocacy by the PP&L Committee, SNACT's broader membership, and its coalition partners — executed with a strategic discipline and a relationship infrastructure built deliberately over several sessions.

The session also demonstrated, with equal clarity, that SNACT's advocacy capacity has grown into something qualitatively different from prior years. The organization entered the Capitol not as a stakeholder seeking attention, but as a trusted technical partner — consulted by legislators on bill language, embedded in coalition strategy, and visible in media and policy narratives from the opening day of session through the final gavel. That elevated standing is the compound interest on years of showing up, providing expertise, and delivering results.

"The new budget marks a successful conclusion to Lamont's two-year effort to provide free breakfast at all Connecticut public schools for all students, allocating more than \$14 million for that initiative."

— Connecticut Public Radio / CT Mirror, May 2, 2026

Not every priority crossed the finish line. The path to universal free lunch for all students — the next logical step — remained is still in question, with several dedicated school meals bills falling short in committee or dying in the Senate. But the structural gains made this session — in relationships, in legislative credibility, in coalition depth, and in the budget baseline now locked in — position SNACT for an even stronger advance in 2027.

Section 1: Pre-Session Groundwork — How SNACT Prepared

The PP&L Committee, led by Eileen and working closely with SNACT President Stephanie Deason and Legislative Specialist John M. Bailey II of TCORS Capitol Group, laid a deliberate foundation before the session's February 4 opening gavel. That groundwork was not incidental — it was the reason SNACT was positioned to move quickly when opportunities opened.

Issue Prioritization: Four Clear Pillars

Rather than spreading energy across a broad bill list, the PP&L Committee narrowed to four strategic pillars entering the session:

- Support for School Meals for All (SM4A) — universal free breakfast as the achievable near-term goal

- The impact of growing meal debt — a new member survey was planned to produce fresh, compelling district-level data for legislators and testimony
- The threat of federal HR-1 cuts to the safety net for free and reduced-price eligible students, and the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)
- The Styrofoam and materials management conversation — SNACT identified early that an operational impact was coming and engaged before the bill was finalized

Key Pre-Session Meetings

Before the session gaveled in, SNACT leadership met directly with Education Committee Co-Chairs Rep. Jennifer Leeper and Sen. Doug McCrory — establishing the working channel that carried through four months of hearings. This kind of early access is not routine. It reflects the credibility SNACT has built through consistent, expert engagement over multiple legislative cycles.

The January 24 School Meals for All press conference — co-organized with End Hunger CT! and SM4ACT coalition partners — kicked off the public campaign with visible legislative support. Senators Looney and Kissel (the latter a tentative yes) were asked to attend. The event was designed with five voices: student, parent, nutritionist, school nurse, and legislator. That architecture reflects a communications discipline that is increasingly central to SNACT's Capitol strategy.

"These stories of need will be used during the public hearing and also on Leave Behind material."

— PP&L internal planning note, December 2025

Denise designated as 'compelling story bank' — real voices from school kitchens feeding the legislative record

The SM4ACT coalition steering committee, including End Hunger CT!'s policy coordinator Amari Brantley, provided strategic intelligence throughout the pre-session period. Amari flagged early that Senate leadership would need strong convincing, identifying Sen. Cathy Osten as not fully on board and Republican leaders Eric Berthel, Heather Somers, and Rep. Tina Courpas as persuasion targets. This advance mapping shaped SNACT's outreach strategy for the months ahead.

Section 2: The Campaign for Free School Breakfast — A Multi-Front Victory

The Governor's Budget Proposal: A Turning Point

On February 4, the first day of session, Governor Lamont's FY2027 budget proposal included \$12–12.5 million for universal free breakfast statewide and elimination of reduced-price lunch charges for approximately 13,000 additional students. The governor announced the proposal the following day in person at Florence E. Smith STEM School in West Hartford — a visibility moment that placed school nutrition at the center of the state's education and equity agenda.

Governor Lamont, February 5, 2026: *"A healthy breakfast provides kids with the opportunity to start the day ready to learn and thrive, and too many of our young people do not have access to this basic life necessity. Every child, regardless of their family's income, should be able to start the day with a healthy meal."*

Education Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker: *"This investment removes both financial barriers and social stigma that can stand in the way of student well-being and ensures every child can begin the school day nourished and ready to learn."*

This was the second consecutive year Lamont had proposed the investment. The difference in 2026 was that it was matched by legislative momentum — more than 70 co-sponsors on HB 5214, broad media coverage, and a coalition that was organized and ready to act.

The Education Committee Hearing — February 23

The Education Committee public hearing on HB 5214 on February 23 was a pivotal moment. SNACT mobilized testimony — including SNACT President Stephanie Deason's powerful statement on behalf of the organization — and coordinated the SM4ACT coalition's witness lineup. The hearing record was built on exactly the architecture the PP&L Committee had planned: operational expertise from food service directors, equity arguments from advocates, and student voices from the districts.

Rep. Moira Rader, D-Branford, Education Committee: *"There are a lot of families that are barely getting by in Connecticut, and yet we can't help them. Something like this — making sure every kid starts their day with breakfast — could alleviate that family's debt and shame."*

Windsor High School senior James Wong delivered testimony that became widely quoted: "I think we've all heard the 'students can't do their best job if they're hungry' line before, right?" — a moment that captured the clarity of the case.

Jill Kress, a food service liaison from Norwalk Public Schools, testified before the Appropriations Committee: "Instead of thinking about learning, or playing with her friends, she was thinking about whether or not she had money and feeling guilty because she was hungry. That is the reality of meal debt."

Navigating the Appropriations Gauntlet

HB 5214 passed out of the Education Committee favorably but required a change of reference to Appropriations — where the dollars-and-cents decisions are made. HB 5144 had an Appropriations hearing on March 5. The PP&L Committee responded with a targeted action: Stephanie Deason reached out to Appropriations Subcommittee members on Elementary and Secondary Education, providing district-specific talking points, a legislator contact list organized by town, and a customizable email template for SNACT members to use. Rep. Exum, Chair of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education — and a constituent of SNACT members — was a key target.

Internal action alert — SNACT, March 20, 2026:

"The Appropriations Subcommittee for Elementary & Secondary Education is meeting today to evaluate the various proposals to fund school meals. We're asking that you please reach out directly to your legislator to stress how important this funding is for your students."

Stephanie Deason, SNACT President, coordinating member outreach in real time

Despite strong policy support, HB 5144 was not voted out of the Appropriations Committee and HB 5214 did not advance through the full process as a standalone bill. The strategy then pivoted — correctly — to ensuring the breakfast funding was embedded in the governor's budget bill (HB 5032) and protected in the final Appropriations Committee budget recommendation.

The Budget Line That Changed Everything

HB 5032 — the governor's budget adjustment bill — contained the decisive vehicle. The specific line item reads:

T456 — School Breakfast Program: [\$2,158,900] → \$14,158,900

Source: HB 5032 as reported by the Appropriations Committee, April 2026

Net new investment: \$12 million | Total FY2027 School Breakfast Program appropriation: \$14.158 million

The Appropriations Committee passed the budget proposal 38-12, mostly along party lines. Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz hosted a panel discussion on April 13, reinforcing the executive branch's commitment.

Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz, April 13, 2026: *"The fact that the governor put free breakfast into his proposed budget, and then the budget that came out of the Appropriations Committee has it is, I think, a very good sign, a positive sign that both the Governor and legislators want to see this happen."*

Connecticut Public Radio reported: "Both proposals would cost around \$12 million and would meet an urgent need, referring to federal cutbacks to food aid programs such as SNAP." Rep. Rader confirmed the proposal had "broad support from at least 100 state legislators."

The Final Budget: A Historic Win — \$14 Million, Universal Free Breakfast

On May 2, the Connecticut General Assembly adopted the \$28.1 billion FY2027 state budget on a 127-21 House vote and 30-6 Senate vote — with bipartisan support. The final budget included the full \$14+ million for universal free school breakfast. The CT Mirror declared it "a successful conclusion to Lamont's two-year effort" — but it was equally a successful conclusion to SNACT's multi-year advocacy campaign.

End Hunger CT! (LinkedIn, May 2026):

"Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont — as a coalition of organizations representing Connecticut's schools, students, families, physicians, farmers, and businesses — we thank you for supporting healthy school breakfasts for all and giving students who are eligible for reduced-priced meals access to free lunch."

James Williams, lobbyist for the American Heart Association and SM4ACT coalition partner, captured the moment: "Connecticut is taking an important step towards ending food insecurity and improving student performance." The American Heart Association, like SNACT, had advocated for the broader benefit — free breakfast and lunch — but recognized the universal breakfast program as a meaningful and durable foundation.

Who Made It Happen: Legislative Champions

The following legislators were active champions for school meals throughout the session and deserve recognition in SNACT's record:

Legislator	Chamber / District	Role in School Meals Campaign
Rep. Moira Rader	House — Branford	Lead House champion; HB 5214; testified and managed floor advocacy
Sen. Ceci Maher	Senate — Wilton	Children's Committee co-chair; pressed for full universal meals (breakfast and lunch)
Rep. Anne Hughes	House — 135th	Co-introduced HB 5171 (CT Grown for CT Kids); active meals coalition member
Rep. Kaitlyn Shake	House — 120th	Co-introduced HB 5171; active in meals coalition
Rep. Exum	House — Appropriations	Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary & Secondary Ed — key budget decision-maker
Sen. Leeper / Rep. McCrory	Education Committee Co-Chairs	Met with SNACT pre-session; provided early channel for HB 5214
Reps. Turco, Nolan, Conley, Gilchrest, Farrar, Michels, Delany, Khana	House	Active coalition participants; constituent outreach targets for SNACT members

What Didn't Cross: The Road to Universal Free Lunch

SNACT and the SM4ACT coalition's ultimate goal remains universal free lunch for all students, this piece of the puzzle is in limbo but there is strong indication that SDE is in a position to fill in the gap left by the budget line item for universal breakfast. Several bills that would have advanced that goal fell short:

- HB 5214 (An Act Concerning School Meals) — moved to Appropriations on a favorable change of reference but was not voted out of committee
- HB 5144 (An Act Concerning Funding for School Meals) — had an Appropriations hearing on March 5 but was not voted out
- HB 5537 (An Act Imposing a Tax on Certain Sweetened Beverages, dedicating revenue to universal free school meals) — reached the Finance Committee agenda and received substitute language, but was not called in the House. SNACT President Stephanie Deason testified in full support. A small victory can be sighted for the creation of a task force to examine the subject in preparation for the 2027 legislative session.
- SB 480 (Preventing Fraud in SNAP and extending penalties to public servants) — died in the Senate; SNACT monitored for nutrition program integrity implications
- SB 497 (Food Security for Veterans, transitional nutrition assistance, Food as Medicine) — died in the Senate, ending the session on the Senate calendar

The fiscal barrier — the spending cap, the volatility of cap-exempt revenues, and competing budget priorities — was the decisive structural obstacle. SNACT's response was entirely correct: shift the battle from standalone bill to budget line, and win there. That strategy succeeded. The foundation is now locked in at \$14 million.

Section 3: Materials Management & Polystyrene — SNACT Shapes a Complex Bill

If the school meals campaign demonstrates SNACT's capacity to win on a priority issue over time, the Materials Management story (HB 5524) demonstrates something equally important: the organization's ability to engage proactively on complex operational legislation before it becomes law, protect its members from unintended consequences, and shape policy in real time through direct dialogue with a bill's primary author.

The Meeting with Rep. Bumgardner — March 12, 2026

SNACT leadership, including President Stephanie Deason, Erin, and John Bailey, met directly with Rep. Bumgardner — the primary author of HB 5524 — on March 12. The meeting was substantive and consequential. Its key outcomes:

- Polystyrene ban scope clarified: The ban applies specifically to polystyrene food service containers. It does not include general plastics (straws, cutlery). The July 2028 implementation date provides a meaningful transition window for districts.
- School exemption secured for recycling programs: If a school has a polystyrene recycling program in place (such as the Old Saybrook pilot with American Styrenics), the district is exempt from the ban. SNACT's advocacy helped preserve this pathway.
- Section 5 — inspired directly by SNACT: Rep. Bumgardner confirmed that SNACT's operational concerns about transition costs shaped Section 5 of the bill, which proposes using the bond bill to expand the managed materials grant program — allowing schools to pay for commercial kitchen upgrades, dishwashers, and transition to reusable service ware using DEEP bond-funded grants.
- Organics threshold — school vs. district distinction: SNACT identified a critical ambiguity. The 26-ton food waste organics threshold in the bill applies to 'entities,' not individual schools. SNACT worked with Erin to push for language clarifying school vs. district level application. Rep. Bumgardner confirmed that most large public schools will fall under this threshold, with the provision primarily affecting prep schools and large institutions.
- Plastics scope confirmed safe: Rep. Bumgardner explicitly confirmed that the broader plastics provisions have no impact on schools — only food establishments. This was an important reassurance for members who had concerns about straws, cutlery, and other single-use items.

Rep. Bumgardner, March 12, 2026: *"Section 5 [is] inspired by SNACT — how will we pay for this transition? I proposed through the bill and with leadership to incorporate in the bond bill the expansion of the managed materials grant to allow for schools to pay for upgrades to commercial kitchens and install dishwashers and pay for reusables."*

Final Status and What It Means for Members

HB 5524 passed the Environment Committee and was tabled for the Calendar in the House on April 15, but ultimately did not advance to final passage — dying in the House in the closing days of session. However, the work SNACT did on this bill is not wasted. The bond funding mechanism advocated by SNACT and Rep. Bumgardner remains a live concept; and the exemptions, scope clarifications, and school-specific protections SNACT secured in the bill's language will carry into whatever version of this legislation comes forward in 2027.

SNACT's engagement with HB 5524 is a case study in proactive policy participation:

- Before the bill was finalized, SNACT was at the table with the bill's author
- SNACT's operational concerns directly shaped Section 5
- The school recycling exemption was preserved because SNACT made the case
- Member concerns about dishwasher staffing costs were registered with the sponsor

This is what 'a seat at the table' looks like in practice.

Section 4: Other Bills of Note — 2026 Session

Beyond the school meals campaign and the materials management work, the PP&L Committee monitored a broad slate of education, environment, human services, and budget legislation. The following reflects key outcomes on bills with direct or indirect implications for school nutrition programs.

Bills That Passed

Bill	Title	Significance for SNACT
HB 5323	An Act Concerning Various Revisions to the Education Statutes — In Concurrence May 6	SNACT secured representation on the Holistic Food Education Working Group established under this bill — a direct win for school nutrition's voice in curriculum and wellness policy. This is the kind of structural access that pays dividends over multiple sessions.
SB 138	An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education — In Concurrence May 6	CSDE recommendations bill; SNACT monitored for any operational implications for school nutrition programs. Passed cleanly.
HB 5468	An Act Concerning the Provision of Parent-Managed Learning (Homeschool) — In Concurrence May 4	Homeschool regulation creates new LEA reporting obligations. Indirect nutrition impact: changes in enrollment and CEP eligibility calculations as some families may re-enroll in public school to access free breakfast.
SB 473	An Act Concerning the Revisor's Technical Revisions to the General Statutes — Signed May 7	Technical revisions bill; includes corrections relevant to nutrition program statutes. Signed by Governor.
HB 5323	Various Education Revisions — Consent Calendar / In Concurrence May 6	Passed; SNACT on Holistic Food Education Working Group secured.

Bills That Died — Significant for Members

Bill	Title	Why It Matters
SB 382	An Act Concerning Edible Food Recovery — File #55, Died in Senate	SNACT monitored. Edible food recovery programs reduce waste and can benefit school nutrition programs; this will likely return in 2027.
HB 5171	An Act Concerning Funding for the CT-Grown for CT Kids Program — Died in Appropriations	SNACT-aligned bill; federal support for farm-to-school programs has shifted and state-level funding becomes more important. 2027 priority.
HB 5537	Sweetened Beverage Tax / Universal Free School Meals — Not Called in House	SNACT fully supported. Revenue from the sweetened beverage tax dedicated to universal free school meals. Reached Finance Committee but was not called in the House. Strong conceptual foundation for 2027.
SB 480	Preventing Fraud in SNAP — Died in Senate	SNACT monitored for nutrition program integrity implications. Did not advance.
SB 497	Food Security for Veterans / Food as Medicine — Died in Senate	Broader nutrition access bill; relevant to school-to-community nutrition pipeline and SNACT's partners at End Hunger CT!
HB 5269	Study: Energy Drink Consumption by Children — Died in House	SNACT monitored for school wellness policy implications.

Section 5: Complete 2026 Bill Tracking Record

The following table reflects every bill tracked by SNACT's PP&L Committee during the 2026 Regular Session.

Bill	Title	Final Status	Position
HB 5030	Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations (General Government) — Appropriations	File Number 680, Apr 20	Monitor
HB 5032	Adjusting the State Budget FY2027 — Appropriations	PASSED — Budget vehicle for \$14M free breakfast	Support ✓
HB 5033	Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Education — Education	File Number 636, Apr 15	Monitor

Bill	Title	Final Status	Position
HB 5144	An Act Concerning Funding for School Meals — Appropriations	Hearing 3/5; not voted out of committee	Support
HB 5149	An Act Concerning Phone-Free Schools — Education	File Number 407, Apr 7; Died in Senate	Monitor
HB 5171	Funding for CT-Grown for CT Kids — Appropriations	Died in Appropriations	Support
HB 5214	An Act Concerning School Meals — Education	Favorable COR to Appropriations 3/5; not voted out	Support
HB 5269	Working Group on Energy Drink Consumption by Children — Children's Committee	Died in House	Monitor
HB 5323	Various Revisions to Education Statutes — Education / Appropriations	In Concurrence May 6 ✓ — SNACT on Food Ed Working Group	Support ✓
HB 5324	Education Mandate Relief — Education	Senate Calendar #485; Died in Senate	Monitor
HB 5468	Provision of Parent-Managed Learning (Homeschool) — Education	In Concurrence May 4 ✓	Monitor ✓
HB 5524	State's Materials Management System — Environment	Tabled for Calendar House Apr 15; Died in House	Engage / Shape
HB 5537	Tax on Sweetened Beverages → Universal Free School Meals Fund — Finance	File #643 Apr 15; Not called in House	Support
SB 1	An Act Concerning Affordability — Finance	In Concurrence May 2 ✓	Monitor
SB 6	An Act Concerning Supports for Children and Families — Children	File Number 705, Apr 21	Support
SB 7	An Act Concerning Educational Equity — Education	Died in Senate	Monitor
SB 138	Implementing Recommendations of the Department of Education — Education	In Concurrence May 6 ✓	Monitor ✓
SB 382	An Act Concerning Edible Food Recovery — Public Health	File #55 Mar 18; Died in Senate	Support
SB 473	Revisor's Technical Revisions to General Statutes — Judiciary	Signed by Governor May 7 ✓	Monitor ✓
SB 480	Preventing Fraud in SNAP / Extending Penalties to Public Servants — Human Services	Tabled Senate Apr 20; Died in Senate	Monitor
SB 497	Food Security for Veterans / Food as Medicine / Meals on Wheels — Human Services	Tabled Senate Apr 20; Died in Senate	Monitor

Section 6: SNACT's Growing Profile at the Capitol

One of the most consequential — and least visible — outcomes of the 2026 session is structural. Over the past several legislative cycles, SNACT has methodically built a legislative presence that has fundamentally changed the organization's relationship with the General Assembly. The 2026 session validated that investment in three concrete ways.

From Advocacy to Technical Partnership

SNACT's engagement with HB 5524 and Rep. Bumgardner is the clearest illustration. The organization was not called to testify after a bill was filed. It was brought into the room before the bill was finalized. Section 5 of HB 5524 — the provision creating bond-funded grants for kitchen upgrades and transition to reusables — was directly inspired by SNACT's operational concerns. That is not stakeholder advocacy. That is co-authorship.

Coalition Leadership, Not Just Membership

SNACT's participation in the SM4ACT coalition steering committee elevated the organization from coalition member to coalition strategist. SNACT President Stephanie Deason's direct call with Rep. Greg Howard — a skeptic who reached out after seeing Stephanie's name on the HB 5214 testimony list — exemplifies this. That conversation addressed the legitimate policy concern (the one-year funding cliff in the bill's structure, and the unfunded mandate risk if districts must continue free breakfast without guaranteed ongoing funding),

demonstrating that SNACT was not simply cheerleading, but engaging on the substance. That kind of credibility is what makes a legislator call you back.

Media Presence and Public Narrative

School nutrition and SNACT's advocacy were embedded in the session's public narrative from the opening day. The governor's February 5 press conference at Florence E. Smith STEM School set the frame. The Lt. Governor's April 13 roundtable kept it visible. CT Mirror, CT Public Radio, and CT News Junkie all covered the issue substantively — and SNACT's member voices, testimony, and coalition relationships were woven throughout. Organizations that have this kind of media presence in an advocacy campaign do not stumble into it. It is the product of years of relationship building with reporters, advocates, and legislative champions.

"Every town in Connecticut has children struggling to have enough food."

— Miranda Muro, CT Food Share, testimony to the Appropriations Committee, 2026

"If we can get them there in the morning to take advantage of the free meal, that means they are going to be there all day. It's priceless."

— East Hartford Superintendent Thomas Anderson, Appropriations Committee testimony, 2026

These voices — amplified through the coalition SNACT helped build — are why the \$14M is now law.

Section 7: Challenges — Honest Assessment

1. The Fiscal Architecture of Connecticut's Budget

The single most persistent structural challenge for SNACT's legislative agenda is not political will — it is the spending cap. Connecticut's volatility cap imposes strict limits on how certain revenues can be appropriated, and the budget's razor-thin \$600,000 margin under the cap in FY2027 meant that every dollar of new investment required a dollar of offset somewhere else. Universal free lunch — estimated at \$30-40 million additional beyond breakfast — faces this constraint directly. SNACT's 2027 strategy must engage this fiscal reality, not just the policy argument.

2. Senate Resistance on Standalone Meals Bills

Both HB 5214 and HB 5144 demonstrated that standalone school meals bills face their toughest test in the Senate, where fiscal concerns carry more weight and leadership was not fully aligned. SNACT's successful pivot to the budget vehicle was the right response. But the absence of a strong Senate champion — comparable to Rep. Rader in the House — is a gap to be filled before 2027.

3. Republican Persuasion — A Work in Progress

Rep. Greg Howard's concerns about taxpayer-funded meals for families who can afford them represent a genuine, principled objection that will not be resolved with equity arguments alone. SNACT's engagement with Howard — and the agreement to meet in person — is exactly the right approach. The fiscal efficiency argument (universal meals reduce administrative costs, reduce meal debt collection, and improve attendance) may land better than the equity frame with this audience. SNACT should develop a Republican-targeted talking points document for 2027.

Section 8: Priorities for 2027

The 2027 session is a long session with a full biennial budget. It is the highest-leverage policy opportunity in the two-year cycle — and SNACT enters it with its strongest foundation in years. The work ahead is clear.

Legislative Priorities

- Sweetened beverage tax (HB 5537 successor): The concept of a dedicated revenue stream for school meals — decoupling the program from annual budget negotiations — is sound and should return in 2027 with modifications that address the House leadership's concerns.
- CT-Grown for CT Kids program (HB 5171 successor): Federal farm-to-school funding has shifted. SNACT should work with Reps. Hughes and Shake to advance state-level continuation funding.

- Materials Management / Polystyrene (HB 5524 successor): With the bill dying in the House in 2026, SNACT should re-engage Rep. Bumgardner on the 2027 version, protect the school exemption and bond grant provisions, and push for the school-vs.-district distinction in the organics threshold language.
- Edible food recovery (SB 382 successor): SNACT should engage on the 2027 version and ensure the bill includes school-friendly language on food recovery logistics and liability.
- HB 5323 — Holistic Food Education Working Group: SNACT's seat on this Working Group should produce a formal report or recommendation by 2027. Ensure the Working Group is convened and that SNACT members are active.

Organizational Priorities

- Senate champion development: Identify and cultivate a primary Senate champion for school meals — someone who will carry the issue in the Appropriations and Finance committees. This is the most critical gap to fill.
- Member-to-legislator pipeline: Build the district-level constituent contact infrastructure — so that when an action alert is issued, members know which legislator to contact and how. The March 20 action alert response showed what this looks like in practice; it should be the norm, not the exception.
- Republican outreach: Develop a targeted, fiscally-framed school meals brief for Republican legislators, grounded in cost efficiency, attendance, and administrative simplification rather than equity framing alone.
- Meal debt survey: Complete the planned meal debt survey of Business Managers and Food Service Directors, and make the data available in time for the January 2027 pre-session advocacy push.
- Quorum advocacy platform: Complete onboarding of SNA's Quorum platform to streamline action alerts, list building, and legislative contact tracking across the membership.
- LAC Planning: Begin LAC 2027 planning in the fall — identify member stories, schedule legislative appointments, and coordinate SNACT's attendance with national SNA's legislative calendar.

Conclusion — A Turning Point, Not a Destination

The 2026 Connecticut legislative session will be remembered, in the long arc of SNACT's advocacy history, as the year the organization's work finally produced a result its members have sought for years: every child in a Connecticut public school will be able to start their day with a free breakfast. That is not a small thing. It means 164,000 fewer children going to their first class hungry. It means school nutrition professionals across the state spending less time managing payment systems and more time focusing on what they do best. It means meal debt — that quiet, grinding indignity — is at least partially addressed.

But it also means something about SNACT itself. The \$14 million that is now written into Connecticut law did not get there through a single hearing or a single season of advocacy. It got there because the PP&L Committee and SNACT's leadership invested in legislative relationships over multiple sessions. It got there because Stephanie Deason and her colleagues were willing to pick up the phone and have a direct, substantive conversation with a skeptical legislator. It got there because SNACT was embedded in the SM4ACT coalition from the start, not as a follower but as a partner with expertise that the coalition needed. It got there because John Bailey identified the right budget vehicle — the School Breakfast line item in HB 5032 — and the organization focused its energy where the decision was actually being made.

The PP&L Committee has built something real at the Connecticut General Assembly over these past several sessions. The evidence is not just in the outcomes — though the outcomes this session are substantial. It is in the call from Rep. Greg Howard when he saw SNACT's name on a testimony list. It is in Rep. Bumgardner saying on the record that Section 5 of his materials bill was inspired by SNACT. It is in the invitation to join the Holistic Food Education Working Group. These are the markers of an organization that is no longer asking for attention at the Capitol — it is being sought out.

The session is over. The work is not. The 2027 long session, with its full biennial budget cycle, will be the moment to secure the next step: universal free lunch for every Connecticut student. The foundation is laid. The relationships are in place. The data is being built. SNACT is ready.