



February 15, 2024

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and esteemed Connecticut General Assembly members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Kristina Roberge, President of the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut (SNACT), which is the professional organization representing Connecticut's school nutrition professionals. I am also the Food Service Coordinator for Groton Public Schools and I reside Waterford, Connecticut. I am testifying on behalf of SNACT on **HB 5048 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025 - Governor's Proposed FY 25 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies**

Our members feed thousands of CT students daily. School meals play a vital role in leveling the educational playing field - just like books, buses, and libraries. Over the past year we have been fortunate to continue to provide breakfast for all students at no cost and to provide lunch at no cost for students who qualify for reduced-price meals. We have seen the positive impact on our students and our school community. We are extremely grateful for this funding and hope it can be continued for the next school year.

Providing students with school meals is a proven strategy to reduce food insecurity, support learning, improve mental and physical health, and bolster educational and economic equity.

Our current paid meals model leaves far too many behind, including families struggling to make ends meet while hovering just above the [Federal income limits for free and reduced school meals](#), which are woefully inadequate in a state such as Connecticut with a high cost of living. Many school districts have seen a substantial increase in school meal debt for those students who do not receive free meals. Uncollectable debt, per USDA, must be settled annually from the district's operating budget, therefore cutting into education funds.

We urge the Connecticut Legislature and Governor Lamont to continue to take the necessary steps to appropriate the funds for school meals. And we hope that moving forward Connecticut joins other states in guaranteeing that every student in Connecticut has access to **healthy school meals at no charge as an integral part of the educational experience.**

Thank you

Kristina Roberge

SNACT President 2023-2024

Food Service Coordinator, Groton Public Schools