

Date

Re: Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 1217 – An Act Providing School Meals to All Students

Dear Members of the Children's Committee,

I am writing in strong support of Raised Bill 1217, An Act Providing School Meals to All Students. This bill is a critical step in ensuring that every child in Connecticut has equitable access to nutritious meals, fostering both their well-being and academic success.

As a state, we provide all other essential educational services to students at no cost—why should food be any different? Proper nutrition is the foundation of learning. Hungry students cannot focus, cannot succeed, and are at a distinct disadvantage in the classroom. Ensuring universal school meals eliminates stigma, increases participation, and provides the nourishment our students need to reach their full potential.

The economic benefits of this bill are undeniable. An analysis by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) found that for every \$1 of state investment into child nutrition programs, an additional \$17 in federal funding enters our economy. This generates more jobs, strengthens local businesses, and increases Connecticut's tax revenue. Simply put, this is a smart investment in our students and our state's financial future.

Additionally, recent ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data underscores the urgent need for universal school meals. In 2022, 39% of Connecticut households—totaling 563,512 families—were below the ALICE Threshold of Financial Survival. This includes both those in poverty and working families struggling to make ends meet. With rising costs and continued economic hardship, many families do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals but still cannot consistently afford school meals for their children. Universal school meals ensure that no child in Connecticut goes hungry at school simply because their family falls just above an arbitrary income cutoff.

Beyond the data, this issue is personal for many Connecticut families.

[Insert Personal Story Here – Example: "As an educator, I have seen firsthand how hunger affects students. I have watched children struggle to focus, become irritable, or even skip meals because they were embarrassed to ask for help. When universal meals were provided during the pandemic, participation in school meals increased, and students thrived. No child should have to wonder if they will have enough to eat during the school day."]

By passing Raised Bill 1217, Connecticut has the opportunity to lead the nation in ensuring that every child has the nutrition they need to succeed. I urge you to support this legislation and prioritize the well-being of our students and the future of our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership in ensuring a brighter, healthier future for Connecticut's children.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]