

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7273

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO STUDY WAYS TO FUND A

Title: UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM.

Vote Date: 4/24/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 4/14/2025

File No.: 895

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This working group will further investigate healthier drink choices and availability in Connecticut public schools, by using the funds generated from a sweetened beverages tax of a \$0.02 per ounce to fund universal free meals in Connecticut's public schools.

PROPOSED SUB. LANGUAGE

Sec 1 was given an addition.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Mark Boughton, Commissioner, Department of Revenue Services

Commissioner Boughton raises the following concerns with HB 7273:

- The administration of the new tax would require significant investment in both personnel, work hours and enforcement actions. These resource requirements are not in the Governors biennial budget proposal.
- This bill requires DRS to contract with academic researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of the tax. This is beyond the scope of DRS and would require resources that are not available in the agency and not accounted for in the Governor's budget.

Christopher Davis Vice President of Public Policy, CBIA

Christopher Davis opposes HB 7273 based on the negative effects it would have on Connecticut's economic competitiveness and investment climate. Connecticut employers involved in the production, distribution, and retail of sweetened beverages, syrups, and

powders would face higher costs due to this proposed new tax. These increased costs will be passed on to consumers, leading to higher prices.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Representative Anne Hughes, 135th Assembly District supports HB 7273 and it's aligning with fiscal policy on public health by using the funds from this tax to fund universal school meals for CT public school students.

Dr. Tatiana Andreyeva, Director of Economic Initiatives, UCONN Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health supports HB 7273 for the following reasons:

- **Evidence-based policy:** Research consistently shows that taxes on sweetened beverages reduce consumption by raising relative prices and, contrary to industry claims, do not result in job losses.
- **Revenue generation:** The proposed tax is expected to raise \$206 million annually.
- **Investing in universal school meals:** Dedicating revenue to fund school meals would meet a critical need. Currently, we remain one of the few states in the region without this essential support for children and families.

Maria Cahill, Senior Director, Government Affairs, Abbott offers the following change to the bills language:

- Striking the words “in liquid form” as they appear in line 9 and lines 13 and 14. This will also align the definition of “medical beverage” with the definition of “milk-based beverage” which expressly allows for powdered form. (See line 22)

Kathleen Callahan, Director of Policy and Civic Engagement, Connecticut Cradle to Career Coalition supports HB 7273 primarily because the funds raised from the sweetened beverage tax would go to combating student hunger. The CT Cradle to Career Coalition recommends the following additions to the bill:

- Reporting on student outcome data in coordination with Connecticut Preschool through Twenty and Workforce Information Network (CP20 WIN)
- Continuing the success of student involvement in menu planning
- Continuing long-term partnerships with local farms to ensure fresh, nutritious options.

Sandra Carbonari, member of the Executive Board of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics supports HB 7273 given the detrimental health consequences from excessive sugar consumption, such as: dental decay, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and triglycerides, insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and fatty liver disease.

Emily Doering, Food Service Director for Watertown Public Schools supports universal free school meals in Connecticut but urges the legislature to ensure that flavored milk is exempt from this tax because of its nutritional value.

Dianne Houlihan, President of The School Nutrition Association of Connecticut (SNACT) supports HB 7273 because it would:

- Provide funding for universal free school meals

- Help school nutrition programs purchase fresh, local ingredients, supporting both students and local farmers
- Support scratch cooking in schools, improving meal quality and nutrition
- Offer an economic boost to Connecticut towns and agriculture

The Following Individuals expressed support for HB 7273:

- **Christian Duborg**, Food & Nutrition Policy Analyst-CWCSEO
- **Francine LoRusso**, Chair of the American Heart Association's Board of Directors in Connecticut
- **Tida Infahsaeng**, Senior Director of Advocacy and Partnerships at United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut
- **Melanie Wilde-Lane**, Executive Director of The Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Centers
- **Jill Kress**, Food Service Liaison for Norwalk Public Schools
- **Jim Krieger**, Executive Director of Healthy Food America
- **Seth Lapuk**, pediatric cardiologist-Connecticut Children's Medical Center
- **Maria Karas**, public health student
- **Stephanie Knight**, Food Services Director-Willington Public Schools
- **Karen Edwards**, retired pediatrician/public health professional
- **Dr. David Katz**, specialist in Internal Medicine, Preventive Medicine/Public Health, and Lifestyle Medicine
- **Lawrence Edwards**, Founder & Dir. of Optimal Mind
- **Maryam Elahi**, President & CEO of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut
- **Margaret Dreher**, Chair of the Public Policy and Legislation Committee for the School Nutrition Association of CT
- **Joslyn DeLancey**, Vice President Connecticut Education Association
- **Sasha Davis**, Policy Analyst School and State Finance Project supports the idea of a universal free school meals program.
- **Christina A. Roberto**, PhD, Mitchell and Margo Blutt, Presidential Associate Professor of Health Policy Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania
- **Kristina Roberge**, Assistant Food Service Director for Groton Public Schools
- **Peter Kennedy**, Managing Principal Organization, Futures Strategy Group
- **Jessica Patterson-Kibbe**-Camp HOPE and Pathways Manager-Safe Futures
- **Maritza Bond**, MPH Director of Public Health City of New Haven
- **Dr. Brandon Barnett** DMD, MDS, Member, American Association of Endodontists
- **Marlene Schwartz**, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences and Director, Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health, University of Connecticut
- **Baron Young**-Executive Director of Food Services for New Haven Public Schools
- **Jennifer Zarrilli**, Pediatric Registered Dietitian and School Food Service Director
- **Becky Tyrrell**, Food Service Director for EdAdvance
- **Kathy Taylor**-President and CEO-Connecticut Community Foundation
- **Joslyn DeLancey**, Vice President Connecticut Education Association
- **Maryam Elahi**, J.D., M.A.L.D., L.H.D. President & CEO Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut

- **Jim Williams**, Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association in CT
- **Tonishia Signore**, Policy Director at She Leads Justice
- **Jeff Sidewater**-CREC Regional Education Service Center
- **Tyler Moore**, Food Service Director for The Bridge Academy in Bridgeport, CT
- **Kathy Taylor**-President and CEO, Connecticut Community Foundation
- **Patrick O'Brien**, Connecticut Voices for Children
- **Ann Percival**, retired special education teacher
- **Mirela Mujcinovic**, public health student
- **Sharon Psychojos**, Food Rescue US
- **Kristen Skulte**, Farmington Food Pantry
- **Patrick Ogurick**, pediatrician
- **Elizabeth Anderson**
- **Kathleen Pasakarnis**
- **Sarah Woozley**
- **Caroline Magnan**-Yale University student
- **Ella Kennen**
- **Elaine Betoncourt**
- **Kaylee Carlisle**
- **Tara Ewers**
- **Stephanie Fultz**
- **Russ Mills**
- **Amanda Ludwig**
- **Elizabeth Fisher**, Registered Dietitian
- **Nancy Fink**, Food and Nutrition Policy Consultant
- **Roberta Friedman**
- **Alla Hill**, Senior Science Policy Associate-CSPI

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Peter A. Brennan, Executive Director, NECSEMA opposes HB 7273 because of the 40-60% expected rise in beverage prices it would cause and would reduce sales to small businesses such as restaurants, movie theaters, grocery stores and convenience stores.

Dominick Cingari, owner Grade A ShopRite opposes HB 7273 because it would push consumers to shop out of state where applicable and leaving local businesses to face that financial downturn.

Mike DeFeo, Coca-Cola Beverage Northeast opposes the sweetened beverages taxes potential increase in prices of soda by some 68% and 48% for packages of tea. This increase could lead to cross-border shopping resulting in revenue loss for Connecticut businesses and the state.

Bree Dietly, American Beverage Association opposes HB 7273 because it is a regressive tax that would have a significant negative financial impact on low to moderate income individuals. Cross border sales would likely become a serious issue with residents who are able could cross into New York, Massachusetts, or Rhode Island to save upwards of 82% on a 12-pack of soda.

Scott Dolch, President & CEO, Connecticut Restaurant Association opposes HB 7273 because it would add another financial burden to small business owners in Connecticut, compounding other recent cost increases like the \$0.10 bottle deposit.

Michael Hogg Senior Manager, State Affairs, NAMA opposes the sweetened beverages tax due to its increase in operation costs on small businesses, the reduction in consumer purchases and the product classification complexities in determining which beverages fall under the sugar-sweetened category

The Connecticut Food Association opposes HB 7273 for the following reasons:

- It Drives Shoppers—and Sales Tax Revenue—Across the Border
- It Raises Prices for Everyone
- It's a Fix for School Cafeterias—but a financial downturn for the rest of the economy

The Following Individuals expressed opposition to HB 7273:

- **Daniel Grace**, Teamsters Local 830, Secretary-Treasurer
- **Robert Ziobrowski**-Secretary-Treasurer & Principal Officer, Teamsters Local 1035
- **Thomas Strahle**-VP of Government Affairs Pepsi Cola of Bristol
- **Ron Tateosian**-COO, Aldin Associates & Savin Brands
- **Francis McGorry**, Liberty Coca-Cola Beverages
- **George Frantzis**, C.O.B. Quassy Amusement and Waterpark
- **Kenneth Coomes**, Managing Member, UST Consultants LLC
- **Keith Beaulieu**, owner of Main Pub in Manchester
- **Jeffrey Rosa**-Sales merchandiser
- **Tim Adams**, owner of J. Timothy's Taverne
- **Thomas Whittaker**
- **Edward Maccio**
- **Jim Batterton**
- **Jerry Sullivan**
- **Charles Baugh**
- **Brian Maxwell**
- **David McClure**
- **Linda Quirici**
- **J.C.**
- **Steven Cohn**
- **Lou DiPietro**
- **Edward Maccio**
- **Beth Ferri**
- **George Frankewicz**
- **Marilina Imperati**
- **Colleen Judson**
- **Kevin Kauffman**

Reported by: Jay Snukis

Date: 5/12/25

