

Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1418

Title: AN ACT REDUCING BARRIERS TO FOOD SECURITY.

Vote Date: 3/14/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/6/2025

File No.:

Disclaimer: *The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Michael "MJ" Shannon, 117th Dist.

Rep. Sarah Keitt, 134th Dist.

Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.

Rep. David DeFronzo, 26th Dist.

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill implements a variety of provisions to address the problem of food and nutrition insecurity in the state. DSS is required to apply for a Medicaid waiver under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act to provide Medicaid coverage for food as medicine and to report on the number of Medicaid beneficiaries receiving food as medicine plus any available data on the effects on the program on the chronic health conditions of the beneficiaries. The minimum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit is increased to \$95. DSS and the CT Department of Agriculture must also establish a health food incentive program for the use of SNAP benefits to purchase fresh produce at farmers markets.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language removed provisions creating the Food Security Fund, food hub grants, universal free school meals, the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), and the SNAP supplemental commodity program.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Department of Social Services, Andrea Barton Reeves, Commissioner:](#) DSS does not support this bill. They state that an 1115 Medicaid waiver to provide coverage for food as medicine would have a corresponding fiscal impact, requiring two sources of funding, which are not included in the Governor's budget. The provision raising the minimum SNAP benefit to \$95 per month they claim would cost the state an additional \$18 million annually. The health food incentive (HIP) program for SNAP they propose would cost the state \$37 million annually. The proposed \$10 million appropriation to DSS to for the supplemental nutrition commodities assistance program is also not in the Governor's budget. The testimony then described the proposed Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) and the many logistical difficulties in implementing and funding such a program in CT. They estimate that the upfront cost for system changes, implementation, and outreach would be approximately \$1.2 million.

[The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity \(CWCSEO\), Christian Duborg, Food Nutrition Policy Analyst:](#) The CWCSEO supports this bill, stating that food insecurity has been increasing in CT with significant impacts. These include worse education outcomes for children, worse physical and mental health outcomes, increased risk of housing insecurity, increased risk of premature death, and increased costs to the individual and/or state. Not only can food insecurity lead to these outcomes, but also inadequate nutrition. The testimony states, "To promote food and nutrition security, nutritious food items must be as affordable and easily accessible as possible. However, for many in this state, that is not currently the case." The author goes on to describe barriers to food and nutrition security in the state and how each section of the bill addresses this.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Connecticut Hospital Association:](#) Writes in support of maximizing state and federal resources to reduce barriers to food security. States that the bill focuses on strengthening the capacity of the state's local food system by establishing a Connecticut Food Security Fund, a grant program to establish or expand food security hubs, establishing a Restaurant Meals Program for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and appropriating additional funds for SNAP. The testimony described aspects of the legislation that targets economic, environmental, and social barriers to food security and praises the community based approach.

[Samantha, High School Student in CT:](#) Writes in support of the bill, recognizing her own privilege and desire to help others. Their Civics in Action Project (CAP) concerns food insecurity and they are implementing an in-school food pantry. States that according a Feeding America study, 468,150 people in CT are food insecure, with a 35% spike in children who are food insecure. They write that increasing SNAP benefits will help reduce child hunger.

[Yale School of Public Health, Anagha Babu, MA Student:](#) Strongly supports the bill, and describes the significant funding challenges for food access initiatives in CT. The loss of federal funds, such as the pandemic relief programs, has led to deep cuts for food security programs. Creating the special fund as described in the bill would help address this lack of federal funding. The testimony states that food insecurity is increasing in CT and impacting minority communities the most. Expanding food security hubs and offering free school lunches for all would significantly reduce food insecurity across these communities. They

write that the Medicaid waivers to cover Food As Medicine would also address the health disparities in these communities. The testimony goes on to describe the other provisions of the bill and why they are important to reducing barriers to food security and maximizing funding resources.

[Working Lands Alliance, Eliza Paterson, Senior Policy Associate:](#) Writes in support of the bill and the grant program established through the Department of Agriculture to address the health and well being of CT's residents and invest in its farms.

[Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Chris Senecal, Public Policy Officer:](#) Writes in support of the bill. Describes the work of the Hartford Foundation and their support for basic human needs in the region, which this bill addresses. The testimony goes on to describe the problem of increasing food insecurity in CT. The Hartford Foundation invests extensively in grants in the region to support reducing food insecurity, but they say philanthropy alone cannot adequately address the issues, which is why the provisions of this bill are necessary.

[Yale School of Public Health, Caroline Wachino, MPH Candidate:](#) Testifies in support of the bill, beginning by describing the problem of food insecurity in CT. The testimony outlines different sections of the bill with supporting sources for context.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Amity Regional School District, Jennifer Byars, Superintendent:](#) Writes in opposition to providing free school breakfasts and lunches to all students. States that this would be a financial burden on school districts without sufficient state funding. They write that the funding mechanisms outlined in the bill are not sufficient to cover costs. The Superintendent estimates that the cost of providing these free meals in their district would be approximately \$480,000 annually, possibly forcing the school districts to make difficult budget cuts or raising local taxes. They are also concerned that this would impact Title I funding for school districts if economically disadvantaged students are no longer accurately counted by free/reduced meal applications. They suggest instead raising the income threshold for eligibility for free/reduced school meals.

Reported by: Breanne Clifton

Date: April 3, 2025