



Tida Infahsaeng
United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut
301 Main Street, Suite 2-5
Danbury, CT 06810

February 6, 2025

Re: HB 6839 Recommendations and SB 1217 Support

Dear Members of the Children's Committee,

I am writing to provide recommendations regarding HB 6839 “An Act Increasing the Number of Children Permitted in Family Care Homes” and to strongly support SB1217 “An Act Providing School Meals to All Students”.

HB 6839 “An Act Increasing the Number of Children Permitted in Family Care Homes”

United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut operates Cora’s Kids, the Family Child Care Network serving providers in Greater Danbury and Greater New Milford. Through this network, we support 116 family child care providers and 50 substitutes and assistants, all of whom play a critical role in ensuring families have access to safe, high-quality child care. We appreciate the intent of HB 6839 to expand child care access by increasing the permitted enrollment in Family Child Care Homes from 9 to 12 children. While we recognize the urgent need to address the shortage of child care slots, we must ensure that any expansion prioritizes safety, quality, and provider readiness.

The burden of solving the child care crisis cannot rest solely on family child care providers. Simply increasing enrollment limits without the necessary resources and safeguards could compromise quality. We encourage a structured approach that includes provider training, technical assistance, and the use of tools like Elevate to determine which providers are best equipped to take on additional children. As an organization deeply embedded in the child care community, we are more than happy to meet with policymakers and provide a forum to hear directly from providers on how this proposal would impact their work. A thoughtful, well-supported expansion will help ensure that increased capacity leads to better access without sacrificing the quality of care that children and families deserve.

SB 1217 “An Act Providing School Meals to All Students”

I urge you to support SB 1217 and champion the future of Connecticut’s students. This bill will help ensure that no child in our state goes hungry and that every child has the opportunity to thrive. Universal no cost school meals are proven to combat food insecurity and obesity, improve educational outcomes, reduce absenteeism, and address shaming, stigma and bullying. School meals for all are a smart investment in our children and the financial stability of our state. According to CDSE, every \$1 in state investment into child nutrition programs generates an additional \$17 in economic activity.

Across our 27-town footprint, which includes Fairfield and Southern Litchfield Counties, more than 300,000 of our neighbors – 42% of households – find it difficult to make ends meet because the cost of living is just too high. These families, collectively known as ALICE (**A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**ontrained,

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Employed), face constant financial strain and are often one emergency away from crisis. Thousands of ALICE families in our region do not qualify for free and reduced priced meals, yet they cannot afford to purchase meals at school, forcing students to skip meals, accrue unpaid meal debt or face stigma for being food insecure.

Many of the state's largest and most diverse districts operate the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), including Stamford, Norwalk and Danbury within our region. We commend the bill's inclusion of CEP schools and districts located in the highest need communities. CEP is a proven model that addresses food insecurity, reduces stigma and creates administrative cost savings. However, many districts face budgetary challenges in sustaining their participation despite widespread need. SB 1217 provides a viable future for this critically important program.

I urge you to support SB 1217 and to consider a more comprehensive approach to expanding quality child care access beyond increasing permitted enrollment. I appreciate your leadership in ensuring a brighter, healthier future for Connecticut's children. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tida Infahsaeng

Senior Director of Advocacy and Partnerships, United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut

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