



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly
Children's Committee
Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker
February 6, 2025

Good morning, Representative Paris, Senator Maher, Representative Dauphinais, Senator Martin, and members of the Children's Committee. I am Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of the Department of Education (Department). I am sorry that I am unable to join you today, but I would like to offer you the following written testimony, and I would be happy to meet with you if you would like to discuss this matter further.

SB 1217, An Act Providing School Meals to all Students

Section 1 of this bill proposal would require all public schools in Connecticut to participate in the US Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and further proposes that meals served under the NSLP be provided to all students at no cost. The Department appreciates the intent of the bill and recognizes that nutritious meals provided under the NSLP support students' physical health, well-being and ability to learn. However, the language of the bill does not provide funding for the Department to support the cost of the meals to districts. The Department estimates that the annual cost for meals at no cost for all students would be approximately \$70 million in state appropriations, which does not include the cost for meals of the 12 public school districts not currently participating in the NSLP.

Section 2 requires the State Board of Education to provide funding to districts through the federally required state match (\$2.354 million) and the Healthy Foods Initiative (\$4.15 million). If all districts are required to participate in the Healthy Foods Initiative as outlined in section one, and at least \$.10 per lunch must be provided, the funding for the Healthy Foods Initiative would need to increase by at least \$772,890. This increase does not include the additional payments to the 12 public school districts not currently participating in the NSLP.

The Department values and appreciates the Children's Committee focus on the physical health and well-being of children in our state considering the important link between health and academic success. We have always enjoyed our collaborative working relationship with this Committee and would be happy to meet with you to discuss this, or any other proposal before the Committee.

Thank you for your consideration.