

**Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing
February 20, 2025**

Governor's Proposed FY 25 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies
H.B. No. 6864 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH,
2027, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Support for School Meals

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Somers, Representative Nuccio, and esteemed Connecticut General Assembly members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Tida Infahsaeng, and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy and Partnerships at United Way of Coastal and Western Connecticut (UWCWC).

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of the Governor's Proposed FY 26-27 Budget for Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies with respect to school meals**. I would like to commend the Governor for including an additional investment in school meals, namely the continuation of no cost school lunch for students who qualify for reduced price meals and no cost breakfast for all CT students. It is a critical step forward on the path to universal no cost school meals, an ingredient essential to student success and community wellbeing. Universal no cost school meals improve academic performance, reduce absenteeism, enhance physical and mental health and eliminate stigma while providing financial relief to families, promoting equity and streamlining operations.

Across UWCWC's 27-town region in Fairfield and Southern Litchfield Counties, **42%** of households—over **336,000** people—struggle to make ends meet due to the high cost of living. Known as **ALICE** (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), these families live paycheck to paycheck, one crisis away from financial disaster. While we appreciate the Governor's proposal, it excludes thousands of families who do not qualify for federal assistance. The income cap for reduced-price meals is **\$57,700** for a family of four, yet the ALICE survival threshold in Fairfield County is **\$150,000**. ALICE families cannot afford to purchase meals at school, forcing students to skip meals, accrue unpaid meal debt or face stigma and

IMPROVING LIVES IN

Greater Bridgeport

10 Middle Street, Suite 1101 Bridgeport, CT 06604
Tel: 203.334.5106 Fax: 203.334.3297

Northern Fairfield County

301 Main Street, Suite 2-5 Danbury, CT 06810
Tel: 203.792.5330 Fax: 203.967.9507

Southern Litchfield County

24 Bank Street, P.O. Box 29 New Milford, CT 06776
Tel: 860.354.8800

Stamford and Greater Norwalk

1150 Summer Street Stamford, CT 06905
Tel: 203.348.7711 Fax: 203.967.9507



bullying.

The Governor's proposal also overlooks the largest, most diverse, and highest need schools and districts that operate the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), including Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk and Stamford. CEP allows high need schools and districts to offer no cost meals to all students and receive the highest level of federal cost-sharing, yet despite this many face challenges in maintaining their programs.

As you consider long-term solutions for student success, we urge you to fully invest in no cost school meals for all students. Failing to do so undermines every investment in education because a hungry child cannot learn. Together we can build a healthier, more equitable Connecticut where no child's success is limited by their economic circumstances. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tida Infahsaeng

Senior Director of Advocacy and Partnerships

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