

Dear Committee on Children,

I am a pediatrician who works in New Haven, CT and Chair of the Advocacy Committee for the CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. These are my personal views and do not reflect those of my employer.

I am writing to **strongly support** S.B. No. 929 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE FREE SCHOOL MEALS TO ALL STUDENTS.

[The American Academy of Pediatrics](#) advocates for expanding access to nutritional assistance programs such as WIC, SNAP, and the school nutrition programs.

As a pediatrician, every day I see how important it is for children to have access to healthy, nutritious food. Children who experience food insecurity, defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food or nutritious food, are at an increased risk of multiple negative health outcomes. [Children who are food insecure are more likely to become ill, develop chronic diseases, and have nutritional deficiencies](#). They are also more likely to become hospitalized and have [increased medical costs](#). Children who experience hunger have [impaired learning in school, are at increased risk of developmental delays and are more likely to experience emotional and behavioral challenges](#). Hunger is also harmful to parents. When families experience food insecurity, parents are chronically stressed and are at increased risk of [developing mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression](#).

Recently I was talking with a mother about ways to improve her 10-year-old son's health because he had just been diagnosed with prediabetes and high cholesterol. I shared with her about the importance of increasing his intake of fresh fruits and vegetables and decreasing the amount of sugar intake. The mother then shared with me that she has been doing her best to cook healthier meals at home because she is very stressed and worried about his health, however due to financial challenges, she is not able to always afford to buy the food she needs. For this family, and so many other families in CT, having access to nutritious, healthy school meals is essential for their children's health and wellbeing.

It is important to recognize that food insecurity does not affect all children and families equally (image below). Due to historical and structural societal inequities, Black and brown children in CT and across the US are more likely to experience food insecurity and not have access to healthy food. Therefore, any policy decisions regarding school meals must address this reality in order to combat inequities.

Therefore, universal access to school meals is a critical action which will protect the health and wellbeing of children in CT.

Thank you for considering my testimony. Please reach out with questions.

Sincerely,

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