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Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly's Appropriations Committee

Governor's Proposed FY 2025 Budget Adjustments for Elementary and
Secondary Education Agencies

Rhonda Evans, Executive Director
Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA)

February 20, 2025

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing about the Governor's budget proposals for the upcoming fiscal year. The Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) is the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federally designated anti-poverty agencies that provide a wide variety of services to nearly 200,000 low- and moderate-income people in all 169 cities and towns across the state. More information about Community Action Agencies is included at the end of this testimony.

I am writing to express our support to include school meals for the next two years in Governor Lamont's proposed budget.

Evidence-based research shows the critical role school meal programs play in alleviating poverty and food insecurity, especially for low-income students. When a child is hungry, it not only affects their ability to think and focus but can contribute to behavioral problems as well. School breakfast and lunch helps address these issues and improves a child's overall health and wellbeing by ensuring they have the nutrition and energy they need to learn and succeed.

Currently, the budget includes breakfast and lunch at no cost for reduced-price eligible students in year one, and free school breakfast for all students attending schools serving breakfast in year two.

We thank the Governor for recognizing the importance of school meals and know the positive impact it will have on students across Connecticut.

However, we request that school breakfast be free in both years, not just in year two.

Federal funding helped provide free breakfast and lunch for students during the pandemic, but that support has gone away. Coupled with rising food costs, our most vulnerable and at-risk families are struggling to meet basic needs –

and other families are on the brink of being in the same situation. By making sure every student has access to free breakfast, families won't have to choose between feeding their child or paying for other essential needs like medicine, gas, or the electric bill.

Let's continue supporting and investing in our children's health, wellbeing, and academic success by making sure no child goes hungry at school. Please consider including free breakfast for all students in years one and two of the budget.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our state. Please feel free to get in touch with any questions at rhonda@cafca.org or 860-305-2937.

More about Community Action Agencies

As the largest statewide safety net service provider, Connecticut's network of Community Action Agencies connects neighbors in need with resources that stabilize and improve lives and communities. These services and resources include, but are not limited to:

- Nutrition (inc. SNAP outreach, Meals on Wheels, and Congregate meals)
- Housing and shelter
- Asset development and financial literacy
- Energy and heating assistance
- Job training
- Early childhood care and education

Through a holistic, comprehensive, multigenerational approach, CAAs work with those in need to plan, achieve, and maintain a realistic path to short and long-term economic self-sufficiency and success.