



# CAFCA

Connecticut Association  
for Community Action

## March 5, 2020 Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly's Human Services Committee

### *In Support of*

### **House Bill 5308: An Act Requiring the Department of Social Services to Work With the United States Department of Agriculture to Explore Certain Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Options**

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Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Deb Polun and I am the new Executive Director of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA), the state association that works with Connecticut's nine Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated antipoverty agencies.

Community Action Agencies work with over 259,000 low- and moderate-income people across the state each year – including your constituents – and connect them to services like energy assistance, job training, child care, Meals on Wheels, and SNAP. As the state's SNAP Outreach contractor, CAAs helped almost 2,000 people apply for SNAP in Connecticut last year.

I am here to express our strong support for House Bill 5308, *An Act Requiring the Department of Social Services to Work With the United States Department of Agriculture to Explore Certain Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Options*.

This bill contains two innovative ideas that will allow people who receive SNAP benefits (formerly Food Stamps) to utilize those benefits more efficiently.

First, it would allow SNAP enrollees to purchase groceries online. Currently, these benefits can be used at grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers' markets across the country – but they have not been allowed to be used for online purchases. Last April, the federal government established a two-year pilot program that enables SNAP enrollees to purchase groceries online through certain retailers. The program is currently live in New York and Washington state, and will be expanded to six additional states as part of the pilot (but not Connecticut).

This program can help SNAP enrollees overcome some of the social determinants of health that currently impede access to nutritious foods, including:

- Living in a “food desert,” where there are few grocery stores;
- having transportation issues that prevent them from easy access to grocery stores;
- being homebound; and,
- working multiple jobs, and not having time to go grocery shopping.

Many of us already buy groceries online and have them delivered to our homes because of the convenience factor. Extending this opportunity to people who face the most barriers to shopping for fresh, healthy food simply makes sense.

This bill helps prepare Connecticut to be ready if and when the federal government decides to expand the pilot program. I would be pleased to work with you to iron out any of the details of this proposal – including ways to promote the use of local grocers whenever possible.

The second piece of the bill would have Connecticut investigate participation in the federal Restaurant Meals Program. This program would allow SNAP enrollees who are elderly, have disabilities, or are experiencing homelessness to use SNAP to purchase meals in authorized restaurants, and potentially, prepared meals from grocery stores. This program is allowable under federal law and is in practice in California. Illinois and Maryland have both passed state laws allowing the program and are awaiting federal approval.

Why this subset of people? Because these individuals have difficulty cooking meals for a variety of reasons – either disability-related, knowledge-related, or simply because they don’t have access to a kitchen to store and cook food.

Notably, neither of these proposals expands SNAP eligibility – they simply make it more possible for people to gain access to food who face difficulties shopping or cooking.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you and the Administration to continue to improve access to nutritious foods across the state.