

## DC Healthy Schools Bill Testimony

Councilmember Mary Cheh, Chair of the Committee on Government Operations and the Environment and Chairman Vincent Gray, Chair of the Committee on the Whole – Good Afternoon

My name is Jody Tick and I am testifying today in my professional capacity as a Capital Area Food Bank program director and personally as a concerned Ward 6 resident and parent of Bennet, a five-year-old who attends Maury Elementary School.

The Capital Area Food Bank is the largest, nonprofit hunger and nutrition education resource in the Washington Metropolitan area. We partner with over 700 non-profit organizations to distribute food to those who suffer from hunger; and educate, empower and enlighten the community about the issues of hunger and nutrition. As the CAFB's Harvest for Health Program Director, my objective is to increase access to healthy food, specifically fresh produce, to low-income individuals and underserved communities in the District and throughout the metropolitan area. The disparities that exist across the District's eight Wards are stunning, especially in regards to the accessibility of affordable, healthy food options. Wards 2 & 3 have access to approximately four times more major chain supermarkets than Wards 7 & 8, which have three major chain supermarkets for a 140,000 residents.<sup>1</sup>

My background in nutrition has made me acutely aware of the role good nutrition plays in the cognitive, physical, and behavioral development of a child and how not only food, but healthy food is critical for youth to realize their full potential as productive individuals and community members.<sup>2</sup> But the experience of the food bank's 30 years has demonstrated that access must be in tandem with education. It's not enough to provide healthy food without an educational context of why and how nutritious food is essential to long term health and well being.

Currently, 1 in 2 children in the District of Columbia is at risk of hunger.<sup>3</sup> With over 70% of the public school and public charter school students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch and students consuming approximately 1/3 of their daily calories at school, the Healthy Schools Bill has the potential to positively impact the health and wellbeing of District youth on an unprecedented level. Specifically, this bill has the opportunity to serve as model legislation, but needs to consider the following:

- **Nutritional Standards:** access to breakfast for more students and eliminating copays for reduced price lunch is essential, but not sufficient. School meals must have the highest nutritional standards and healthy food must have an educational component that is integrated into the school curriculum. The USDA HealthierUS School Challenge program is an

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<sup>1</sup> DC Hunger Solutions. 2006. Health Food, Healthy Communities: An Assessment and Scorecard of Community Food Security in the District of Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> Center on Hunger and Poverty. 2002. The Consequences of Hunger and Food Insecurity for Children: Evidence from Recent Scientific Studies. Heller School for Social Policy and Management, Brandeis University.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census, 2000

improvement on the status quo, but the Institute of Medicine (IOM) <sup>4</sup> nutritional standards are what we should aspire to attain. Other school districts across the country, such as those in Chicago<sup>5</sup>, are moving to implement the IOM Standards and the District should as well, even if it is progressively, over time. In addition, it is also important to consider that nutritional standards only matter if the food provided is consumed. School food must taste good and be appealing.

- **Training and Technical Assistance:** to successfully implement this legislation, training and support must be made available for schools, food service providers, administrators, etc. by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education in conjunction with non-profit partners. Training must be approached as a collaborative, partnership effort; not punitive.
- **Accountability:** accountability is key to realizing the full potential and intent of this legislation. For example, the most recent national survey that assesses nutrient content of school meals offered and served compared to USDA's current regulatory standards found that while progress has been made, few schools (6 to 7 percent) offered or served NSLP lunches that met *all* of the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children (SMI) standards, and there was a statistically significant decline in the percentage of schools meeting the vitamin A standard. This legislation must ensure that schools not only have the capacity and support to fully comply with any new nutritional standards, but are held accountable to achieving those standards. A government point person should be held responsible for the implementation of the School Nutrition (Title II) components of the bill and serve to coordinate efforts across government and between schools and the non-profit sector.

The Capital Area Food Bank is doing its part to ensure healthy local communities. Through the development of a new strategic vision, the food bank will strive to increase the amount of food we distribute from 25 million pounds to 30 million pounds with **half** of the 30 million in fresh produce. The Capital Area Food Bank also collaborates with and supports the DC Farm to School Network as another access vehicle to provide healthy, local foods to the community. As a mother, I work hard to make sure my kids have nutritionally sound meals and that they understand how fruits and vegetables help them grow. Why should I expect anything less from the meals they eat at school? It's time for the District to join organizations, parents, and the community and commit to ensure bright and healthy futures for all the District's youth.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the **Committee on Government Operations and the Environment and the Committee of the Whole** of the City Council and for considering this important piece of legislation.

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon, Ann and Mary Kay Fox. 2007. School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study III: Summary of Findings. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research Nutrition and Analysis. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/ORA/menu/Published/CNP/FILES/SNDIII-SummaryofFindings.pdf>. Access 3/25/10

<sup>5</sup> Eng, Monica. 2010. Chicago school officials plan to ditch donuts, Pop-Tarts. [Chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com).