Human Services Committee
JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-497 / Bill Status / Public Hearing Testimony
Title: AN ACT PROTECTING FOOD SECURITY FOR VETERANS AND OTHERS AND MITIGATING FEDERAL CUTS TO NUTRITIONAL ASSISTANCE.
Vote Date: 3/19/2026
Vote Action: Joint Favorable
PH Date: 3/17/2026
File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Human Services Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill stems from changes happening at the federal level with regards SNAP programming. It is intended to expand food security throughout the state with the help of a Medicaid waiver program, while also increasing the annual rate for Meals on Wheels providers. Provisions are intended to eliminate exclusionary eligibility requirements and make accessing nutritious food easier. With no opposing testimony, the overwhelming sign of support signals a favorable nod to families, veterans, low-income earners, and more – who, above all, often need government assistance and stability the most.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut Department of Social Services, Andrea Barton Reeves, Commissioner: appreciates the Committee's efforts to help at-risk individuals who may lose assistance. DSS notes, however, that timing and complexities will make it difficult to implement a new eligibility system and form of SNAP. The Department foresees costs exceeding millions and cannot support Sections 1-4.

Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO), Melvette Hill, Executive Director: takes the position that "if the state doesn't take decisive action," problems in child development, education, physical/mental health, life expectancy, and more "will likely keep growing larger." CWCSEO applauds the Committee's efforts, finding that they

will help eliminate food insecurity and therefore address one of the state's most commonly cited challenges.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:
Connecticut General Assembly, Senate Democrats Office, Senator Martin Looney, Senate President Pro Tempore: supports the bill's effort to mitigate federal changes in SNAP with the creation of a transitional assistance fund. Sen. Looney assures that, through this legislation, veterans will maintain their benefits despite changes in work requirements.

Connecticut Hospital Association: Believes that the bills' provisions protect access to nutrition assistance, stabilize food access, and support community nutrition programs. CHA also supports directing DSS to seek federal approval for a Medicaid waiver to implement a food as medicine pilot program. They note patients are frequently being screened for health-related social needs and appreciate the move to increase Meals on Wheels funding.

Connecticut Legal Services, Matthew Dillon, Attorney:
Connecticut Legal Services, Jean Mills Aranha, Attorney:
Connecticut Legal Services, Nicholas Russell, Attorney:
Support the bill as it would "patch the safety net," provide nutrition assistance benefits for veterans regardless of work requirements and establish a countermeasure to HR 1. They propose that losing SNAP eligibility would have serious impacts, providing the state with a precedent-worthy moment to feed ineligible neighbors. CLS urges that an amendment in Section 4 be made to remove the 12-month time limit on assistance and permit qualifying without additional requirements.

New Haven Legal Assistance, Sara Parker McKernan, Policy Advocate: believes that the bill should mandate screening of individuals for continued SNAP eligibility/exemptions prior to terminating benefits. Supports Section 2 and the appropriation of $40 million for a transitional program, closing with an encouragement that Connecticut discontinues its reliance on emergency food systems in the absence of a SNAP-like program.

Connecticut Voices for Children, Ruchi Sheth, Research and Policy Associate: Stands with SB 497, affirming that "a state funded food assistance program in the image and likeness of SNAP, even one that is time-limited, can help Connecticut bridge the gap imposed by HR 1."

Greater Hartford Gives Foundation, Chris Senecal, Senior Public Policy and Media Relations Officer; and Judy McBride, Director of Strategic Partnership Investments: Support, highlighting its motive to help vulnerable individuals who are losing benefits to changes in work requirements and provide them with financial assistance, job training, and case management. The foundation also supports the proposal on DSS, which offers produce prescriptions and nutritional counseling, in addition to increasing the minimum annual rate for Meals on Wheels.

Collaborative Center for Justice, Executive Director, Rev. Teran Loeppke:
Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference, Deacon David Reynolds, Associate Director of Public Policy: Both groups are in favor of the bill, supporting the use of $40 million of the state's budget reserve as a buffer. They consider this proposal necessary to

provide critical support for individuals at risk of losing benefits due to new federal requirements and changes – approximately 36,000 Connecticut residents.

Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Pediatrician, Molly Markowitz:
As a pediatrician, they share the profound impacts food insecurity has on a child's physical and mental health. Links can be made that inconsistent access to nutritious food to "impaired brain development, difficulty with emotional regulation, poor academic performance, and disrupted sleep." For these reasons, they urge the Committee identify and implement state-funded solutions that guarantee reliable access to nutrition assistance regardless of work status or citizenship.

Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Service Providers, Joel Sekorski, President:
Holds that investing in Meals on Wheels help "stabilize the network of community nutrition providers serving older adults" and prove to be a "smart fiscal decision for the state," presenting malnutrition, reducing hospitalizations, and delaying/avoiding higher-cost placements, per Mr. Sekorski.

American Heart Association, Jim Williams, Connecticut Government Relations Director:
Has concerns with the fact that "food is medicine" is part of a larger SNAP bill, compelling AHA to clarify that the component "is more appropriately an access to care issue, not a food security issue." The Association is supportive of the provision but feels it should not be comingled.

Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC), Alison Weir, Executive Director: notes having hundreds of clients on SNAP who are predominantly single and fall short of the work requirement. These individuals are said to have, more historically, higher rates of unemployment and disability, making their adjustments to civilian life difficult. The Center finds it "shameful" that the federal government isn't willing to lend food assistance but remains proud of the state's proposed actions in SB 497.

Service Employees International Union Connecticut State Council, Stacey Zimmerman, Deputy Director: Aligns testimony against the Trump administration for causing gaps in SNAP programming.

Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, Peter Benner, Member:
Sisters of St. Joseph, Elaine Betoncourt, Member:
Concordia Lutheran Church, Susan Bourret, Member:
First Church of Christ Congregational, Linda Bronstein, Member:
Westminster Presbyterian church, Thomas Buckley, Member:
Connecticut Project Action Fund, Kevin Bunnell, Leader:
First Church of Christ, Mario Chiappetti, Member:
Felipe Colon:
Connecticut Project Action Fund, Melissa Costas, Leader:
First Church Congregational, Stanley de Mello, Member:
Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Holly DeYoung, Member:

Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), Kirsten Ferguson, Community Oral Health Champion:
First Church of Christ Congregational, Gail Gagnon, Member:
Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, Jocelyn Spencer, Lead Organizer:
Gardner's House Inc, Maggie Gardner, Founder:
Kehilat Chaverim, Susan Garten, Member:
First Church of Christ, Allyson Glass, Chaplain & Pastor:
Connecticut Project Action Fund, Yahaira Guitard, Leader:
FREE CT, Organizer, Jaymiah Herring:
Randa James:
Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry, Michael Johnson, Executive Director:
Connecticut Project Action Fund, Sophy Johnston, Leader:
Music Therapist, Rachel Kohn:
Kehilat Chaverim, Sharon Langer, Member:
Congregation Beth Israel, Judith Levy, Member:
Unitarian Society of Hartford, Sherry Manetta, Member:
Hartford Friends, William Marut, Member:
Emanuel Lutheran Church, Stanley Maticka, Member:
Immanuel Congregational Church, Natalie Mendes, Member:
New London Human Services Network, Jeanne Milstein, Co-Convener:
Lovie's Farm, Matt Mitchell, Owner:
Bianca Morales:
Connecticut Project Action Fund, Maryvette Morales, Leader:
First church of Christ Congregational, Jim O'Brien, Member:
Cultivating Justice, Levi Lynn Ofori, Member:
New Haven Legal Assistance, Sara Parker McKernan, Policy Advocate:
Unitarian Universalist Society East, Josh Pawelek, Minister:
Universalist Church of West Hartford, Lindsay Plath, Member:
Katherine Salk:
St. Patrick and St. Anthony Church, Patricia Spring:
Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Tom Swan, Executive Director:
Connecticut Project Action Fund, Kate Sweeney, Leader:
Unitarian Universalist Society East, Monica van Beusekom, Member:
Congregation Beth Israel, Jane Zande, Member:
Contend that access to quality, healthy food is a fundamental, basic "human need" and right. They assert that cuts to programs, like SNAP, come at the expense of vulnerable residents and recipients who already face immense systemic hurdles, including low-income, child, adult caretaker, immigrant, victim, veteran, aging resident, disabled, and homeless populations. A percentage also supports funding programs (also referred to as "stabilizers"), made possible through the transfer of Federal Cuts Response Fund money.

Life 1122, Founder, James Belin Jr.:
Chicks Ahoy Farm, Intern, Kelian Diaz:
FREE CT, Dadie Dorsinvil:
Stop Solitary CT, Director, Barbara Fair:
Prison Policy Initiative, Senior Policy and Advocacy Analyst, Aleks Kajstura:
Sarah Kareem:
Fire Ring Farm, Farmer, Erin Livensparger:
Chicks Ahoy Farm, Intern, Olivia Martinez:

Bloomfield Farmers Market, Manager, Laura Pallandre:
Chicks Ahoy Farm, Community Organizer, Susan Reynolds:
Edward Russell:
Fridgeport, Reginald Saint Fortcolin:
This group requests support for the bill, utilizing data to back their claim. They suggest that nearly 70% women and over 80% black women on probation (earnings under $20,000 annually) suffer most from food insecurity, and that research attributes food security to increased neighborhood safety and reduced recidivism. It is said that millions of people on probation are affected by SNAP restrictions, so with mixed federal definitions on what constitutes a "probation violator," inconsistencies are estimated to rise.

Registered Dietition, Cynthia Kozak:
Supports SB 497 and the access it grants to healthy food options. Ms. Kozak offers her professional stance on the matter, adding that good nutrition makes a healthy body and leads to productive lives.

Anonymous 14:
Rani Arbo:
Retired Professor, Mary-Jane Eisen:
Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Ruth Hofstatter, Member:
Nancy Kirchmyer:
Roberta La Monaca:
Carmen Lanche:
Talia Orr:
Lisa Palisi:
Michael Rollins:
Kristianna Smith:
Provide general comments in favor of offsetting funding cuts to SNAP. They suggest that this program be extended to everyone so as to make life manageable and stable for families, regardless of one's violations, convictions, and circumstances, with one person even claiming: "there is no offense worthy of starvation."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed.

Reported by: Zachary Robinson **Date: April 6, 2026**