



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 7, 2023**

**HB 6857, An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The
Food As Medicine Working Group**

**HB 6854, An Act Establishing The Office Of The Food Access Advocate And Tax
Incentives For Grocery Stores In Food Deserts**

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 6857, An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The Food As Medicine Working Group** and **HB 6854, An Act Establishing The Office Of The Food Access Advocate And Tax Incentives For Grocery Stores In Food Deserts**. CHA supports HB 6857 and HB 6854.

Connecticut hospitals continue to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and are now facing new challenges of treating sicker patients than they saw before the pandemic, with a dedicated but smaller workforce who are exemplary but exhausted. They are also experiencing significant financial hardships brought on by record inflation. Through it all, hospitals have been steadfast, providing high-quality care for everyone who walks through their doors, regardless of ability to pay.

HB 6854 proposes to create the Office of the Food Access Advocate to provide for a centralized resource to address food insecurity in the state and provide tax incentives for the location of grocery stores in food deserts. HB 6857 proposes to establish (1) a pilot program to provide Medicaid funding for produce prescriptions for Medicaid enrollees with certain health conditions, (2) a working group to develop additional recommendations, including for providing medically tailored meals for such persons, and (3) Medicaid reimbursement for certified dietitian-nutritionists who provide medical nutrition therapy.

Hospitals and healthcare systems are important partners in offering evidence-based food and nutrition interventions as part of hospital efforts to address health-related social needs. Specific to HB 6854, CHA requests that a member of the Connecticut Hospital Association be included as a member of the proposed working group to develop additional food as medicine recommendations.

An emerging but compelling body of research indicates that food and nutrition interventions delivered in the healthcare system, commonly referred to as “food as medicine,” may be associated with improved health outcomes. These data suggest the potential for food and nutrition interventions to play a prominent role in the prevention, management, treatment, and even in some cases, reversal of disease. When broadly deployed, interventions that are effective for individual patients have the potential to affect population health.

In addition to delivering clinical excellence, hospitals are catalysts, innovators, and leaders in improving the health of their entire communities. Identifying hunger and food insecurity as a health issue has led to a commitment by Connecticut’s hospitals to work outside of the four walls of the hospital and clinical setting. In addition to screening for food and nutrition insecurity in clinical settings, hospitals are partnering with local economic development organizations to attract grocery stores into neighborhoods considered food deserts, and are offering medically tailored meals through targeted patient programs, as well as operating food banks in partnership with community-based organizations.

These efforts highlight how hospitals are working to improve the communities they serve through strategic partnerships to address food and nutrition insecurity. The tax credit for grocery stores proposed in HB 6854 and the work group to develop specific recommendations for food as medicine proposed in HB 6857, would help hospital efforts to attract health-promoting businesses into their local communities and help enable hospitals to establish further partnerships to address complex social drivers of health across the state. With the recognition that clinical care, social, environmental, and behavioral factors all impact health and are inevitably and inextricably linked, CHA supports the creation of partnerships such as those described in HB 6854 and HB 6857 to advance efforts to address food insecurity and hunger in Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.