

## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO NO-COST MEALS FOR THE 2022/2023 ACADEMIC SCHOOL YEAR

A hungry child can't learn, and no child should be made to feel less than because he/she can't afford a meal. No-cost meals allow students to learn and thrive. School meals and farm-to-school programs help Connecticut kids be healthy while creating equity and economic opportunities in our state.

### Our Ask: Continue universal access to no-cost meals.

#### Background

- In the 2021/2022 school year, nearly 75 million no-cost meals were served, compared to a total of 25 million free, reduced-price AND full-price meals served the school year prior.
- Federal and state funding, launched during the coronavirus pandemic, was not renewed and funding for universal meals has run out.
- School food service directors and families are scrambling for solutions.
- Students across the state are losing anywhere from half a year to just over a full year of learning. Without no-cost meals, the numbers could continue to be crippling to CT's education system in unforeseen ways.
- Our neighbors in Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts and New York support universal no-cost meals.

#### Why school meals make a difference

- Studies show that school meals are the most balanced, nutritious meals students eat throughout the day, regardless of income.
- Food is medicine. Food insecurity increases the risk of chronic illnesses, medical issues, hospitalizations and medical costs.
- Hunger is harmful to parents too. The stress they feel when they can't feed their children causes mental health challenges like depression and anxiety.
- Black and Brown children are more likely to experience food insecurity, leading to negative health outcomes.
- Students in grades K-12 are more successful academically and behaviorally with nutritious meals.
- No-cost meals reduce stigma and feelings of shame. Students report that no-cost meals create a level playing field where students feel equal in school.



**1 in 8 Connecticut Children Are Hungry; There is at least one family who is food insecure in each of Connecticut's 169 towns.**



**ALICE** is a data-driven approach to quantify the cost of a basic household budget in each county in each state, and to show how many households are struggling to afford it. Households that lack the income to pay for necessities such as housing, food, childcare, health care, technology and transportation are **ALICE**, an acronym that stands for **A**sset **L**imited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed.

- Even though Connecticut is one of the richest state in the country, there are still 425,000 residents who are food insecure, which means they lack consistent access to enough food for every person in their household to live an active, healthy life.
- In 2021, more than 40% of **ALICE** children lived in households that couldn't afford enough food; most of these families did not qualify for free/reduced-price school meals or for SNAP.
- Currently in CT, a family of four qualifies for no-cost meals if their pre-tax income is less than \$36,075, or less than \$51,338 for reduced-price meals.
- Even before the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 38% of Connecticut's households were living paycheck to paycheck or falling behind.
- The USDA predicts food prices will increase up to 12% this year and more in the next.

## ALICE Survival Budget

|                      | Two Adults,<br>1 Infant,<br>1 Preschooler | Family's<br>Expenses in<br>2022* |
|----------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Housing              | \$1,310                                   | \$1,549                          |
| Child Care           | \$1,857                                   | \$2,498                          |
| Food                 | \$936                                     | \$1,108                          |
| Transportation       | \$826                                     | \$977                            |
| Health Care          | \$742                                     | \$878                            |
| Technology           | \$75                                      | \$89                             |
| Miscellaneous        | \$687                                     | \$813                            |
| Taxes                | \$1,122                                   | \$1,327                          |
| <b>Monthly Total</b> | <b>\$7,555</b>                            | <b>\$9,239</b>                   |
| <b>Annual Total</b>  | <b>\$90,660</b>                           | <b>\$110,868</b>                 |
| <b>Hourly Wage</b>   | <b>\$45.33</b>                            | <b>\$55.43</b>                   |

\*Based on the US Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator; adjusted child care expense calculated using CT Office of Early Childhood, 2022 Early Care and Education Market Rate Survey

### Out of Reach: The Cost of Raising a Family in Connecticut

The cost of basic needs rises faster than non-essentials *and* wages.

Updated to include inflation, a family of four needs to earn \$55.43/hour working 40 hours per week, or \$27.71/hour if both adults are working, to support the ALICE Household Survival Budget.



**Connecticut United Ways are committed to helping ALICE families achieve a more secure financial future.**



**If you have questions or would like to discuss this policy agenda, please contact:**

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