

Testimony of
Joslyn DeLancey
Connecticut Education Association
Before a joint meeting of the
Committee on Children

Re:

SB 929 An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free Meals to All Students

HB 5194 An Act Establishing a Grief Counseling Program for Children

February 7, 2023

Representative Linehan, Senator Maher, and members of this esteemed committee, my name is Joslyn DeLancey, and I am the Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents educators in over 150 school districts across Connecticut.

We are testifying today in support of **SB 929, An Act Expanding School Meal Programs to Provide Free Meals to All Students**, and **HB 5194, An Act Establishing a Grief Counseling Program for Children**.

Regarding SB 929, CEA fully supports extending the free meal program available in public schools to all students. As our members witness every day, even in the most affluent school districts, children go hungry while in school. The current school lunch program reaches many students in need but not all. Many children who qualify for free or reduced-priced lunches refrain from applying or participating to avoid stigmas associated with being identified as low-income. Even though teachers often reach into their pockets to buy meals for students, many others go silently hungry from class to class. Expanding the school meal program to all students would prevent children in school from going hungry.

Regarding HB 5194, CEA supports establishing a statewide grief counseling program, particularly as an extension of the landmark children's mental health legislation enacted just last session. As a veteran elementary school teacher in Darien Public Schools, I have experienced a school community rocked by preventable tragedies associated with children's mental health. My neighborhood is not unique in experiencing the loss of a student to suicide or the impact of adverse childhood experiences on the school community. And no school or community is immune. CEA believes that providing resources to children for grief counseling through a statewide effort would be wise and help to ensure seamless access to counseling regardless of a student's address.

Thank you.