



Legislative Testimony  
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**Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 6854, An Act Establishing the Office of the Food Access Advocate and Tax Incentives for Grocery Stores in Food Deserts**

Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, Ranking Members Seminara and Case, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of House Bill 6854, An Act Establishing the Office of the Food Access Advocate and Tax Incentives for Grocery Stores in Food Deserts.

For much of this country's history, formal and explicit racial restrictions prevented people of color from accessing the mainstays of economic life, including employment and homeownership. Although racial classifications were outlawed by civil rights statutes passed in the 1960s, disparities in wealth, income, and other economic opportunities remain, preventing us from achieving true racial justice in America.

Food insecurity and food deserts are one nefarious way in which our state's checkered history of racial inequity rears its head. Food deserts, defined by the 2008 Farm Bill, are "an area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities."<sup>1</sup> Many studies have found links between food access in neighborhoods to redlining and segregation.<sup>2</sup> Surveys by the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline George & Adie Tomer, *Beyond "Food Deserts": America Needs a New Approach to Mapping Food Insecurity*, BROOKINGS INST. (Aug. 17, 2021), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/beyond-food-deserts-america-needs-a-new-approach-to-mapping-food-insecurity/>.

<sup>2</sup> Paula Dutko, et al., *Characteristics and Influential Factors of Food Deserts*, U.S. DEPT. AG. (Aug. 2012), [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/45014/30940\\_err140.pdf](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/45014/30940_err140.pdf); Jerry Shannon, *From Food Deserts to Supermarket*

Department of Agriculture found that rates of food insecurity were much higher than the national average for single-parent households and for Black and Latinx households.<sup>3</sup> In Connecticut, it is estimated that 490,000 people in Connecticut are food insecure, including 131,000 children.<sup>4</sup> People experiencing hunger in Connecticut are concentrated in our primarily Black and brown cities, meaning that food insecurity and food deserts are racial justice issues.<sup>5</sup>

House Bill 6854 would create the Office of Food Access Advocate, a centralized body focused on fighting food insecurity, similar to a body that already exists in New Haven at the city-level. House Bill 6854 also importantly creates a tax incentive for full-sized grocery stores to be built in food deserts, which are primarily in Black and brown communities. Attracting large grocery stores to communities will also create jobs for community members. This is vital because investing in our communities is what allows them to thrive. This legislation is a good first step towards ending food insecurity in Connecticut. The ACLU-CT supports House Bill 6854, and urges this Committee to do the same.

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*Redlining: Making Sense of Food Access in Atlanta*, ATLANTA STUDIES (Aug. 14, 2018), <https://atlantastudies.org/2018/08/14/jerry-shannon-from-food-deserts-to-supermarket-redlining-making-sense-of-food-access-in-atlanta/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Food Security and Nutrition Assistance*, U.S. DEPT. AG. (accessed Mar. 6, 2023), [https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%2089.5%20percent%20of,than%202018%20\(11.1%20percent\)](https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-security-and-nutrition-assistance/#:~:text=In%202019%2C%2089.5%20percent%20of,than%202018%20(11.1%20percent).).

<sup>4</sup> *Hunger in Connecticut*, CONN. FOODSHARE (accessed Mar. 6, 2023), <https://ctfoodshare.org/about-us/hunger-in-connecticut/>

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*