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Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee submitted testimony on [H.B. No. 5117](#) (RAISED) An Act Concerning Genetically-Engineered Foods.

Dear Environment Committee Chair, Senator Ed Meyers and Representative Richard Roy, vice chair, Sen. Andrew Maynard and Rep. Philip Miller, ranking members, Sen. Andrew Rorabach and Rep. Clark Chapin along with all members of the Environment Committee – thank you for allowing my testimony to be submitted to your committee.

My name is Michelle McCabe, from **Fairfield, CT** and I have been involved in grass roots advocacy for school nutrition for the past four years. For three of those years, I have served as chair of a Fairfield PTA council committee representing all schools within our PTA, that addresses the nutritional quality of foods served and sold to our students. We have combined policy work with educational events and activities to both raise community awareness and instigate real, positive change in the quality of the Fairfield school lunch program.

My involvement in this issue commenced with the core issue of CT HB 5117 – the **consumer's right to know**. My oldest son developed a corn allergy coincident with my reading of Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma*. In the first instance, I had to become diligent in reading labels to ensure that my son limited the amount of corn he ate. What I discovered was how many foods have some form of corn in them, and how dependent I was on proper labeling to protect his health. In the second instance, I learned how little I actually knew about the origins of the food I was putting on our table to feed my family and the importance of that knowledge to decide what we eat.

One of my first actions as chair of our PTA committee was to lobby our school district to provide nutritional information and ingredients for all the foods sold in the cafeteria online. With the prevalence of food allergies and obesity among our children, I knew that this information in an **accessible** form was of great importance to parents. We were successful in our efforts because of the overwhelming support in our community for transparency. **All of this was accomplished without an overwhelming cost burden to the taxpayers in our community.**

In essence, the same issue of transparency is before us with the GMO labeling proposal in HB 5117. I know that you will be reading and hearing testimony that discusses the scientific evidence concerning genetically-modified foods and crops. You will find that there isn't agreement on the danger or safety of these products and I imagine that difference of opinion will be reflected in positions among yourselves on the Committee. What I hope we all can agree on is that people should be able to **easily** determine what is in their foods so that they can confidently apply their position on GMOs when they feed their families.

In my work on school lunch, the subject of **personal responsibility** is paramount. Many believe that it is the parents' responsibility to feed their children nutritious food and that the occurrence of obesity and other diet-related conditions is the parents' responsibility to mitigate. However, as a parent, I would argue that our ability to protect our children from diet-related illness becomes more difficult with each day. If we as individuals and parents are expected to take responsibility for our diets and our health, we must have all of the facts. This was the argument we made when asking for information on the foods in the Fairfield school lunches. Prior to our success, the only way a parent could determine what was in the food was to either go through the menu with the Food Services manager (which could be about 100 items) or go to the school's kitchen and look at the labels on each of the many boxes. It was onerous to be sure but, at least, it was possible to get the facts. In the case of GMO foods, we as consumers cannot investigate the origins of all our food products; it is an unreasonable and impossible task. The only way we can make an educated choice is through the labeling of products.

I am a Connecticut-native and I take great pride in my state. Connecticut has pioneered many important "firsts" in our nation, many of them involving the rights of citizens and the right to knowledge: first Constitution, first municipal public library, first newspaper, first law school, and so many others. In this legislative session, Connecticut is poised again to be a trailblazer in supporting a citizen's right for knowledge with HB 5117. I hope that you will preserve our state's heritage by passing the GMO labeling bill, to ensure that our ability to choose for ourselves and our children is protected.

Submitted: Feb. 20th, 2012 via email

CITATION and REFERENCE:

Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma*