



February 26, 2026

Dear Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

As the Director of the Food System Policy Division (FSPD) at the City, I am writing in support of the proposed ordinance changes to the food business licensing process.

Over the last 7.5 years, FSPD has assisted food entrepreneurs through the licensing process and connected them to City and community resources necessary to establish and grow their businesses in New Haven. Throughout this process, entrepreneurs need to navigate several regulatory and financial obstacles. Reducing these barriers and making food business entrepreneurship more accessible would unlock more inclusive economic opportunities in New Haven.

Similar to the micro-food business ordinance that I drafted, proposed, and was later passed by the Board of Alders in 2018, these proposed policy changes support small food business entrepreneurs by reducing the financial and regulatory barriers to accessing economic opportunity in New Haven.

New Haven's catering license fee is currently \$650 in the first year (and then \$550 in the following years), which is among the highest in the region. For early-stage food entrepreneurs, this upfront cost can be a major barrier — sometimes pushing people to delay starting, operate informally, or abandon an idea altogether. It is discouraging to see entrepreneurs attempt to start their business in New Haven, but choose to pursue their efforts in another town or city due to these barriers and challenges.

First Year Free would (1) Help new food businesses start and grow; (2) Lower barriers for entrepreneurs with limited startup capital; (3) Encourage more participation in the city's permitting process; and (4) Support local caterers, pop-ups, and food businesses as they grow.

A catering or small packaged goods business does not bring in the same financial resources as a larger business, and as a result, does not have the same financial capacity for overhead. Small startup food businesses in New Haven begin with limited time and financial resources. This is more impactful for people who have been historically shut out of access to capital.

Right now, small packaged-goods businesses — like makers of pickles, hot sauce, jams, baked goods, coffee, tea, or spice blends — are often required to apply for the same licenses as



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full-service caterers. This can mean \$1,000+ in fees before selling a single jar or bag — even though packaged foods are already highly regulated under state law (including inspections, certifications, and more).

A Consumer Packaged Good Permit would (1) Make it easier for small makers to sell at farmers' markets and night markets; (2) Encourage local entrepreneurship and creative food businesses; (3) Aligns fees with actual health risk; and (4) Position New Haven as a city that supports small-scale makers and startups.

The implementation of these proposed changes would help create more equitable access to entrepreneurship among diverse populations and create the opportunity for startup businesses to build financial and operational capital in an industry in which startup costs are often prohibitive.

Therefore, I write in support of these food policy changes to the City's licensing process.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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