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In Support of Best City to Start

Submitted by: Jahkeeva Morgan

VP of Business Incubation and Entrepreneurship, The Lab at ConnCORP

Dear Members of the Board of Alders,

I am writing in strong support of the Best City to Start initiative.

Through our work at the business incubator, I work closely with entrepreneurs across Greater New Haven, including some early-stage food founders navigating the city's permitting and licensing systems for the first time. Through our programming, we've supported caterers, packaged-goods makers, pop-up chefs, and food entrepreneurs who are working to formalize and grow their businesses.

What we consistently see is this: the current fee structures and licensing pathways are disjointed, misaligned, and disproportionately burdensome for small-scale food entrepreneurs.

For many of the businesses that come through our programming, the upfront costs and additional fees is not only inconvenient, it is prohibitive.

These costs:

- Delay business formation
- Push entrepreneurs into informal operations
- Divert capital away from equipment, staffing, marketing, and compliance
- Create confusion about what permits are actually required

The entrepreneurs we support are not trying to bypass regulation. They are trying to comply. But when city-level fees stack on top of state-level approvals, particularly for packaged goods that are already regulated under state law, the system feels misaligned with actual risk and scale.

The proposed "First Year Free" catering license and the creation of a lower-cost packaged goods permit are thoughtful, practical solutions.

Importantly, these reforms are not giveaways. They are economic development strategy.

Food businesses are often the most accessible entry point into entrepreneurship particularly for women, immigrants, and entrepreneurs of color. When we make it easier for small-scale food makers to start and grow, we strengthen neighborhood vibrancy, local job creation, and tax revenue over time.

At The Lab, we have supported many food entrepreneurs who have persevered despite these barriers. But I also know there are businesses we have not yet connected with and some who never formalized because the system felt too costly or too confusing.

Best City to Start is an opportunity to align our policies with our stated commitment to small business growth.

If we want New Haven to be a city that truly welcomes entrepreneurs, especially food founders, we must ensure that our fee structures reflect scale, risk, and equity.

I urge you to support this initiative.

Sincerely,



Jahkeeva Morgan
VP of Business Incubation and Entrepreneurship, The Lab at ConnCORP