

November 19, 2019

Chairwoman Sonia Chang-Díaz
Chairwoman Kay Khan
Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities
State House
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Please support S48/H145, An Act Relative to an Agricultural Healthy Incentives Program

Dear Chairwoman Chang- Díaz and Chairwoman Khan,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Public Health Association we are writing to ask for your support to enact the Healthy Incentives Program into statute. The Massachusetts Public Health Association is the champion for public health in the Commonwealth. Our focus is on policies and programs that prevent illness, disease, and injury, and promote health equity among all residents. In order to secure the longevity of the Healthy Incentives Program, we respectfully request that S48/H145 be reported favorably out of committee without delay.

Since April 2017, the Healthy Incentives Program has provided more than \$13.5 million in sales for local farmers, and more than \$13.5 million in healthy produce for some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable families. This program is based on a proven model which provides an added value to beneficiaries of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when purchasing fruits and vegetables.

As we are all too aware, food insecurity is a reality for many here in Massachusetts, especially for black and Hispanic households who are disproportionately affected by this complex problem. While we are one of the wealthiest states in the nation, many families we count as friends and neighbors are struggling to put food on the table. Currently, there are more than 760,000 individuals receiving SNAP benefits in MA – many of whom are children and seniors. While S48/H145 won't solve the underlying problem of persistent poverty, it will dramatically improve the food choices available to low income families and individuals. Currently, a SNAP household receives up to \$21 a day for their entire family, essentially amounting to \$5 per person. This subsidy means the difference between food on the table for many families and going without. However, that extra \$21/day does not always afford a family the opportunity to buy more fruits and vegetables.

There are several factors that make it difficult for low income families and individuals to buy healthy foods, including a lack of access to grocery stores and higher prices at small grocers and convenience stores. In addition to physical access barriers, healthy foods simply cost more. The Harvard School of Public Health found that healthy eating costs \$1.50 more per person per day, or \$550 per year. For many low-income families receiving SNAP, that additional \$550 per person is just not within their budget.

We know that when given the choice, all families, including SNAP beneficiaries, purchase healthier food for themselves and their kids. Launched in April 2017, the Healthy Incentives Program provides monthly incentives to SNAP households of up to: \$40 for families of 1-2; \$60 for families of 3-5; and \$80 for families of 6 or more, when they purchase fresh, local, healthy vegetables and fruits from Massachusetts farmers at farmers' markets, farm stands, CSAs, and mobile markets. The money they spend at these retailers is immediately added back to their EBT cards, and can be spent at any SNAP retailer. HIP provides Massachusetts families the opportunity to stretch their budgets and purchase more fruits and vegetables.

Jodie Silverman, President

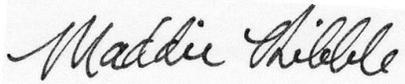
Carlene Pavlos, Executive Director

Since the launch of HIP in 2017 more than 70,000 families have earned HIP incentives, and over 100,000 individuals increased their fruit and vegetable intake by 1 serving per day. This increase in healthy eating means cost savings to our healthcare system and the injection of these funds spent at local retailers means increased economic benefit to our local economy.

We ask for the committee's support, so we can protect this investment and maintain our national leadership role in nutrition incentives, by reporting S48/H145 out favorably without delay.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,



Maddie Ribble, Director of Public Policy



Kristina Kimani, Coalition & Advocacy Manager