



P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707

DATE: October 17, 2017

TO: Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform
FR: The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 501, FoodShare healthy eating incentive pilot program.

Chairperson Krug and Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform Members:

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is comprised of over 30 statewide groups representing people with all disabilities and all ages, their family members, advocates and providers of disability services. We would like to voice our support for Assembly Bill 501, which provides discounts on healthy foods for individuals using FoodShare, and ask that you consider an amendment to this bill that would add an educational component to the pilot program.

FoodShare is an important program for people with disabilities. According to the Department of Health Services, 25% of FoodShare recipients are either elderly, blind, or have a disability; and 46% of households receiving FoodShare benefits contain at least one individual that is, either elderly, blind, or has a disability.¹

The "Healthiest Wisconsin 2020" report prepared by the Department of Health Services found that in Wisconsin adults with a disability are more likely to be overweight or obese than adults without a disability.² This report found that 74% of Wisconsin adults with a disability were overweight or obese while 61% of adults without a disability were overweight or obese. However, it is important to note that individuals with disabilities are more likely to be overweight or obese for a variety of reasons, including: a lack of healthy food choices; difficulty chewing or swallowing; the use of medications that contribute to weight gain; physical limitations that make it difficult to exercise; a lack of accessible environments and several other factors.

In addition, a higher percentage of people with disabilities are of lower income and, therefore, more often live in "food deserts." A "food desert" is an area with little or no access to large grocery stores that offer fresh, healthy and affordable foods. Instead of such stores, these urban

¹ Wisconsin Department of Health Services, "FoodShare Wisconsin At-A-Glance." Accessed at: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/fsataglance.htm>

² Wisconsin Department of Health Services, "Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Baseline and Health Disparities Report." Accessed at: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/hw2020/baseline.htm>

and rural areas often contain only fast food restaurants and convenience stores. Physical access to large grocery stores can be difficult for people with disabilities of low incomes, particularly if the stores are distant, the store is not on a bus line, or if the consumer has no vehicle. Carrying fresh food from grocers can also be a challenge for individuals who must take public transit, walk long distances, or have other physical limitations.

While there are many barriers that make it difficult for people with disabilities to access healthy foods and achieve good health, we believe that Assembly Bill 501 has the potential to reduce some of the financial barriers to purchasing healthy foods for people using FoodShare. We hope the Legislature will continue to address the other barriers to nutrition in Wisconsin and look for ways to promote physical activity in our communities. Along these lines, we hope you will consider adopting an amendment to Assembly Bill 501 that would add an educational component to this bill.

One of our member organizations, the Arc Wisconsin, has had success with a nutrition education and healthy eating program aimed at people with intellectual disabilities. Their HealthMatters curriculum focuses on healthy eating, portion control and physical activity. Of the 542 participants, 181 decreased their BMI and 145 decreased their blood pressure.

An educational component to this legislation would help connect FoodShare participants with local grocery stores and farmers' markets, provide participants with healthy recipes and provide training on cooking skills.

We ask that you support Assembly Bill 501 and adopt an amendment to add an educational component to this bill.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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