2020 BUDGET PRIORITY: EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION:

Expand state funding for initiatives that improve access to healthy food for Michigan families and children in both rural and urban areas of the state, including the Double Up Food Bucks and 10 Cents a Meal programs.

BACKGROUND:

Federally funded food assistance does not ensure access to healthy food for many Michigan families, particularly those living in urban communities of color or in more remote rural areas. State funding for access to healthy food has been minimal, with most initiatives relying on federal or philanthropic dollars.

**The Double Up Food Bucks program needs to be expanded statewide.** The 2019 state budget includes $300,000 for the Flint Double Up Food Bucks program. In the 2018 budget year, the Legislature approved $1.5 million to expand the program to four regions outside of Flint, but those funds were not approved for the current budget. An increase in the 2020 budget year will promote the growth of farmers market and grocery store participation statewide.

**Additional expansion of the 10 Cents a Meal program is needed.** The 2019 budget also includes $575,000 (an increase of $200,000) for the 10 Cents a Meal program, which provides incentives for schools to purchase healthy food grown in Michigan. The additional funds allowed expansion of the program to two more Prosperity Regions, bringing the total number of Michigan counties where the program is available to 43. The 2020 budget should include funding to expand the program to students in Prosperity Region 10, which includes Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties.

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**OBESITY AMONG MICHIGAN ADULTS**

![Percentage of Michigan Adults with Obesity](image)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity
WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many Michiganders live in communities with limited access to healthy food. An estimated 1.8 million people in Michigan, including 300,000 children, live in communities with few affordable healthy food options, forcing them to either travel to shop or make do with the food that is readily available. Without the option of reliable private or public transportation, many families with low incomes must depend on smaller convenience stores where the offerings are typically high-calorie with low nutritional value.

Access to healthy food is a problem in both urban and rural areas of the state, and some residents are more likely to be affected. Low-income, urban neighborhoods of color have the least availability of grocery stores and supermarkets compared with both low- and high-income White communities. In addition to communities of color, children in families with low incomes, seniors and the disabled are more likely to face barriers accessing fresh and healthy foods.

The lack of access to healthy food can affect the health of Michigan residents and contribute to long-term healthcare costs. Removing barriers to the consumption of healthy food is a first step in reducing obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and other diet-related diseases that have become increasingly prevalent—even among children. In Michigan, 1 in 3 children is overweight or obese, and 70-80% of obese children become obese adults. This comes at a cost to the state: Michigan spent an estimated $12.5 billion on obesity-related healthcare costs in 2018 alone.

The expansion of healthy food businesses can spark local economies. When supermarkets or other healthy food establishments like farmers markets do more business in underserved, low-income communities, opportunities for local farmers are expanded, and new jobs are created in neighborhoods where they are most needed. In addition, improved access to healthy food can reduce the costs of diet-related diseases that affect employers in the form of absenteeism and disability.