



# 2021 BUDGET PRIORITY: EXPAND ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

## LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION:

Expand state funding for initiatives such as the 10 Cents a Meal program, which improves access to healthy food for Michigan children in both rural and urban areas of the state.

## BACKGROUND:

**Funding for the 10 Cents a Meal program needs to be restored.** The 10 Cents a Meal program, which provides incentives for schools to purchase healthy food grown in Michigan, began in the 2016 school year as a \$250,000 pilot program available in 22 Michigan counties. Every year since then, the Legislature has increased funding to enable expansion of the program to school districts in additional counties. The 2019 budget included \$575,000 and brought the total number of counties where the program was available to 43. For the 2020 budget year, the Legislature allocated \$2 million and expanded eligibility to school districts statewide as well as early childcare centers, but the Governor vetoed this funding. The \$2 million should be restored to support healthy meals served in schools and child care centers.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

**More than 1 in 6 Michigan children are experiencing food insecurity and an estimated 300,000 live in communities with limited access to healthy food.** Many families must choose between food and other basic needs, and either travel to shop or make do with the food that is readily available. Without reliable private or public transportation, many families with low incomes must depend on smaller convenience stores that offer few healthy options. For some children, school or child care settings are the only reliable sources of regular meals. Thus, it's critical for these institutions to optimize the quality of the food they serve.

**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 people with disabilities are more likely to face barriers accessing fresh and healthy foods. Previously, 10 Cents a Meal funding wasn't available in parts of northern Michigan, where child food insecurity is highest, or the three southeast Michigan counties where the state's school-age children are concentrated. The vetoed funding would have enabled expansion of the program to these areas where it could have the greatest impact.

**A high-quality diet boosts health, school attendance and academic performance.** Promoting the consumption of healthy food is a first step in reducing diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and other diet-related diseases that have become increasingly prevalent—even among children. Food insecurity in Michigan is associated with an estimated \$1.8 billion a

### 10 Cents a Meal is a Michigan Success Story

- More than 134,000 kids served across 57 school districts
- Increased sales for more than 160 local farms and food-related businesses
- 93 Michigan-grown fruits, vegetables and dried beans served
- Diversified school menus have featured 67 new foods

