



American Heart Association/American Stroke Association Testimony
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
March 16, 2017
HB 49
Healthy Food for Ohio

Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the House Finance Committee Subcommittee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Laxmi Mehta. I am the Director of the Women's Cardiovascular Health Program and an Associate Professor of Medicine at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. I am also the President of the Ohio Chapter of the American College of Cardiology. In addition, I serve on the American Heart Association's Great Rivers Affiliate Board of Directors.

On behalf of the American Heart Association and the Ohio Chapter of the American College of Cardiology, please accept this written testimony requesting a renewal and expansion of funding for the Healthy Food for Ohio program in HB 49. Before discussing our specific request, some facts (based upon the attached fact sheet and letter to Governor Kasich with citations) are in order:

- Heart disease is the number one killer in Ohio
- In 2013, 26,878 Ohioans died of heart disease
- Ohio ranks 40th in the nation in overall health
- OVER 41% of Ohioans report consuming fruit less than once daily
- One of the main factors contributing to heart disease is obesity
- While there are many factors that contribute to obesity, a diet of fatty, processed foods is a large contributor
- Over TWO million Ohioans lack local access to fresh, affordable food
- Ohio is home to nearly 500,000 children who do not have healthy food options
- Over 1/3 of the Ohioans have diabetes or is pre-diabetic

In sum, too many communities and too many children lack access to a nearby grocery store or corner store that provides healthy food options.

As lawmakers, you are continually confronted with problems that seemingly have no easy or direct "fix". In this case, the options are clear. Paving a way for rural grocery stores and healthy food options at corner stores is an obvious link to combating this public health crisis. And while making healthy food available to Ohioans may pass the "altruistic" test, it also passes the "economic test".

Chronic diseases cost the state an inordinate amount of money; consider the Medicaid budget. Medicaid spending increased in Ohio 30% from 2011 - 2015. Over \$50 billion is spent annually to address chronic disease. You may or may not be surprised to learn that we can track the demographics of this increase in spending to rural counties such Lawrence, Pike and Scioto counties.



These counties have the worst access to healthy foods and/or grocery stores. And the economics go beyond Medicaid costs. Unhealthy people in poverty are unable to work with almost 70% percent reporting that "health as fair or poor" prevents them from working. Thus, chronic disease, directly related to poor eating habits, is a drain on our Medicaid program AND prevents Ohioans from contributing to the economy through work.

In the last operating budget, you and your colleagues committed \$2 million to launch the Healthy Food for Ohio Program (HFFO). Thanks to your efforts, healthy food is starting to be an option in food deserts. For example, under the leadership of Ohio House Finance Committee Chairman Ryan Smith and Ohio Senate President Pro-Tempore Bob Peterson, with great help from Senator Sherrod Brown and Congressman Steve Stivers, and the Finance Fund Capital Corporation, Vinton County, the only county in the state without a grocery store in the ENTIRE COUNTY, will soon break ground on a grocery store (see enclosed article). And this is just one example of how your effort in the last budget is DIRECTLY addressing this public health crisis. But so much more needs to be done.

For reasons stated in this testimony and the attachments, we are requesting a renewal and expansion of the Healthy Food for Ohio program in the state operating budget. Your attention to this matter is guaranteed to bring a return on your investment in forging a healthier Ohio.

If you have any questions or want more data on the issues discussed herein, please contact Krista Bistline, AHA/ASA Senior Government Relations Director, at 614-396-4393 or Belinda Jones, Capitol Consulting Group, at 614-679-5062.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this important endeavor.

Laxmi Mehta, M.D., F.A.C.C, F.A.H.A.