



ProducePERKS

Interested Party Testimony- House HHS Subcommittee HB 166- State Operating Budget April 10, 2018

Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Roemer, and Ranking Member West, Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 166, the State Operating Budget. I am here to offer another perspective on the impact of the Produce Perks program: that of a healthcare professional, small business owner and an operator of the Produce Perks program. I fully support Produce Perks Midwest's funding request of \$500,000 in each fiscal year to expand Produce Perks services to reach more SNAP recipients and Ohio farmers across the state.

My name is Ben Holter and I am a pharmacist and co-owner of two independent pharmacy locations in Nelsonville and Athens. I have had the pleasure of working with Produce Perks to further the availability of fresh local produce to low-income families in my community. Produce Perks doubles the purchasing power of SNAP consumers to purchase fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables from Ohio farmers and grocery-retailers across the state by providing a \$1-for-\$1 match for SNAP consumers to buy local produce. My pharmacy, Shrivvers Pharmacy, is one of the 100+ locations statewide where Produce Perks is operational.

Food is a basic need that approximately 1.5 million Ohioans struggle to afford. Ohio has the 7th highest number of households receiving SNAP benefits. Furthermore, 16.2% of Ohio households and 19.5% of those with children struggle to afford enough food. Food insecurity and lack of access to healthy meals are leading causes of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and cancer and nearly 2 out of every 3 deaths is due to a chronic disease. Ohio spends \$50 billion annually to address chronic diseases while healthy produce remains elusive for far too many low-income individuals. More often than not - fresh, healthy food is simply not an option for countless Ohio families and it's estimated that the cost to eat a nutritious produce rich diet can total \$1.50 more per day. For a family of four, this means an increase in food costs of \$180/month (\$2,200 annually). For those receiving SNAP benefits, food is often rationed by what is most affordable.

As a healthcare professional, I can attest to the benefits proper nutrition has in preventing chronic disease and personally witness on a daily basis the detrimental effects that poor nutrition has on the health of our communities. When first deciding to offer fresh, local produce in our pharmacy, our goal was to promote the overall health of the community and provide another access point for healthy food. Produce Perks has been a great partner in helping further that goal and I strongly encourage you to support and expand this program throughout the state. Produce Perks directly impacts the health and wellness of countless Ohio

families – increasing affordable access to healthy foods, increasing revenues for Ohio farmers and retailers, and strengthening local economies.

I ask that you support our amendment of \$500,000 in each fiscal year within the Department of Job and Family Service's TANF Block Grant for Produce Perks to expand services to reach more SNAP recipients across the state. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.

Thank you

Ben A. Holter, PharmD, RPH, MBA

Partner/Pharmacist, Shivers Pharmacy