

Committees

Ranking: Small Business
Arts, Athletics, and Tourism
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Representative Terrence Upchurch 20th House District

House Bill 543 – Sponsor Testimony

Chair Click, Vice Chair Mullins, Ranking Member Brewer and distinguished members of the House Community Revitalization Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill 543. This bill will create the Food Desert Elimination Grant Program, which will provide grants and incentives to grocery retailers for the establishment of grocery stores located in food deserts across the state. Food deserts are areas where many are unable to access fresh fruits and vegetables, without traveling overly long distances to their nearest grocery store. This past year, a report issued by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies found that 67 counties in Ohio have at least one food desert, where there is a lack of affordable, accessible, and healthy food.¹

Ohio is the Heart of it All, and the key to a healthy heart is regular exercise and a balanced diet. Unfortunately, food deserts have made a balanced diet inaccessible to many Ohioans. Research has shown that a lack of access to healthy food will only compound medical issues such as diabetes or obesity and drastically increase the chances of these issues developing in childhood. These strains cost our nation an additional estimated 1.4 trillion dollars every year in healthcare and insurance. In order to assist those Ohioans and eliminate burdens on our taxpayers, Ohio needs to invest in these food desert regions.

It is vital that we create a program that will benefit the grocery retail chains who invest in Ohio, as well as close the resource gap for constituents across the state. This bill will stimulate Ohio's economy, create new jobs, and improve the health and stability of our state's families. I urge your support for this bill, and I am willing to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terrence Upchurch", is written over a horizontal line.

Terrence Upchurch
20th House District

¹ <https://www.stateneews.org/government-politics/2025-08-15/report-over-two-thirds-of-ohio-counties-have-deserts-with-no-grocery-store-and-no-pharmacy>