



you're the **cure**

Members of the Committee:

Going to the grocery store is something most of us take for granted. In Ohio, too many communities have few places to purchase fresh produce, lean protein and dairy. In fact, over 2 million lower income Ohio residents, including more than 500,000 children, are at risk for chronic disease and diet-related death due to a lack of access to healthy foods. A simple trip to the grocery store in these communities is anything but easy.

Not having a local grocery store can have far-ranging impacts on people's lives. Families who live in communities where they can't find a bag of apples or a head of lettuce are at greater risk of becoming overweight and obese. Studies show that the closer we are to neighborhood supermarkets, the more likely we are to have healthier lives and lower body weight too.

Fortunately, there's a solution to these problems: healthy food financing. Healthy food financing programs create public-private partnerships that make a real difference for individuals, communities and even entire states. This critical loan and grant financing helps healthy and affordable food retailers overcome the higher initial barriers to entry into low-income and underserved communities—barriers like land acquisition financing, construction and workforce development.

Once grocery stores have been built in underserved communities, the results are dramatic. In Pennsylvania, an initial grant of \$30 million in state dollars was leveraged with private funding and created 88 new grocery stores, 5,000 new jobs and \$190 million in total investment. What's more, it brought healthy food choices to 400,000 Pennsylvanians who wouldn't otherwise be able to access healthy produce, lean protein and whole grains.

The American Heart Association supports creation and funding of a healthy food financing program, through an initial state investment of at least \$10 million, to specifically target underserved and low income neighborhoods through this grocery and corner store initiative. The state funds would be leveraged with private funding. In addition, while the loans and grants would be flexible to meet community needs, we support sustainability efforts to ensure healthy food is available in the future through these retail outlets, as well as evaluation of the health and economic impact of the program.

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