



March 8, 2016

Nancy Jenkins  
State Representative  
District 57

Chair  
House Appropriations:  
Agriculture and Rural Development Subcommittee

Chair Jenkins and Members of this Committee:

The American Heart Association supports House Bill 5180. We believe that a healthy diet and lifestyle are the best weapons to fight cardiovascular disease, the number one cause of death for all Americans. In Michigan, more than 30% of individuals are obese, the second highest rate in the Midwest region. Research is increasingly demonstrating that individuals residing in communities without reliable access to healthier food options suffer disproportionately from high rates of many diet-related illnesses. This also bears tremendous economic consequence as Michigan spends \$3 billion annually on obesity-related medicals costs; if rates continue to increase at current levels, that cost is expected to climb to \$12.5 billion by 2018, which will be paid by all of our residents.

As you know, Michigan is the second most agriculturally diverse state in the nation. Despite this, more than 1.8 million residents, including 300,000 children, live in communities where access to fresh and healthy food options is severely limited. These individuals may have access to other food, but their bodies are likely not obtaining the nutrients needed to be healthy. Nutrient-rich foods have minerals, protein, whole grains and other nutrients but are lower in calories. They may help you control your weight, cholesterol and blood pressure. The negative health impact on underserved communities, particularly on our youth, is alarming. Illnesses, which in past decades were shown to be more prevalent among age demographics ranging from the 40s to 60s, are unfortunately becoming common in individuals in their 20s, and even much younger. Maintaining the status quo is the reason kids today have a life expectancy that is five years less than that of their parents.

There is, however, opportunities to change this trend. Healthy Food Access efforts, like the one House Bill 5180 supports, would incentivize healthier food retail development in communities of need. It would also expand market opportunities for our state's farmers. These types of initiatives have demonstrated success across the nation in both improving healthy food access while creating jobs, and strengthening the economic well-being of urban and rural communities.

Having access to fresh and healthy food options is vital to a healthy Michigan. The appropriation sought through this legislation would not only help in this effort, it would show that our state cares about the health and wellbeing of all residents, regardless of location. I encourage your support of House Bill 5180.

Respectfully,

Dave J. Hodgkins  
Government Relations Director  
American Heart Association