

# Michigan League for Public Policy

## 2019 BUDGET PRIORITIES

### Expand Access to Healthy Foods

#### — LEAGUE RECOMMENDATION —

**Expand state funding for initiatives that improve access to healthy food for Michigan families and children in both rural and urban areas of the state including assistance for farmers markets, the Double Up Food Bucks and 10 Cents a Meal programs, and the Michigan Corner Store Initiative.**

**BACKGROUND:** Federally funded food assistance does not ensure access to healthy food for many Michigan families, particularly those living in urban communities of color or in more remote rural areas. State funding for access to healthy foods has been minimal, with most initiatives relying on federal or philanthropic dollars.

- The 2018 state budget includes: 1) \$380,000 for the Flint Double Up Food Bucks program, plus a supplemental appropriation for \$750,000 for the program statewide; 2) \$500,000 (\$250,000 in state funds) for the purchase of wireless equipment by farmers markets so families can use their Bridge Cards to purchase healthy food; and 3) \$375,000 (an increase of \$125,000) for the 10 Cents a Meal program that provides incentives for schools to purchase healthy foods grown in Michigan.
- The Legislature failed to fund a Michigan Corner Store Initiative that was intended to provide grants to small food retailers to increase the availability of fresh and nutritious foods in low- and moderate-income areas of the state.

#### WHY IT MATTERS:

- **Large numbers of Michiganders live in communities with limited access to healthy food.** An estimated 1.8 million people in Michigan, including 300,000 children, live in communities with few healthy food options, forcing them to either travel to shop or make do with the food that is readily available. Without the option of reliable private or public transportation, for many families with low incomes the only option is to rely on smaller convenience stores where the offerings are typically high-calorie with low nutritional value.
- **Access to healthy food is a problem in both urban and rural areas of the state, and some residents are more likely to be affected.** Low-income, urban neighborhoods of color have been found to have the least availability of grocery stores and supermarkets compared with both low- and high-income White communities. In addition to communities of color, children in families with low incomes, seniors and the disabled are more likely to face barriers accessing fresh and healthy foods.
- **The lack of access to healthy food can affect the health of Michigan residents and contribute to long-term healthcare costs.** Removing barriers to the consumption of healthy food is a first step in reducing obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and other diet-related diseases that have become increasingly prevalent—even among children. In Michigan, 1 in 3 children is overweight or obese, and 70-80% of obese children become obese adults. This comes at a cost to the state: Michigan is expected to spend \$12.5 billion on obesity-related healthcare costs in 2018.
- **The expansion of healthy food businesses can spark local economies.** When new supermarkets or other healthy food businesses like farmers markets and corner stores come into underserved, low-income communities, opportunities for local farmers are expanded, and new jobs are created in neighborhoods where they are most needed. In addition, improved access to healthy food can reduce the costs of diet-related diseases that affect employers in the form of absenteeism and disability.

