



TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

October 17, 2017

Rep. Pronschinske public testimony on AB 530, FoodShare Pilot

Chairman Krug and committee members, thank you for holding a public hearing today on Assembly Bill 530 which tasks the Department of Health Services with developing a pilot program, with stakeholder and expert input, which restricts food and beverage purchases under the FoodShare program that have little or no nutritional value.

This is a simple bill. This bill does not necessarily *prohibit* the purchase of any particular food. It simply creates a pilot program which requires some parameters be in place on the amount of food with little to no nutritional value purchased in the FoodShare program. With this being a public benefit where taxpayer dollars are being used, it's important to make sure these dollars are being spent effectively, in the way the program was originally intended, and in a way that does not ultimately cause harm to the recipients of these benefits.

I am sure all members of this committee are very familiar with this information, but FoodShare is Wisconsin's name for the federal SNAP, supplemental nutrition assistance program, which provides food purchasing benefits to families with a household income under 200% FPL. For a family of four, this is an annual gross income threshold of \$48,600. The average number of FoodShare recipients in 2016 was 12.4% of Wisconsin's total population, or 718,272 individuals, and 2016 FoodShare benefits payments totaled close to one *billion* dollars. These are significant numbers and dollars. Dollars that should be spent wisely, and in line with the true intent of the program.

The Food Stamp Act of 1964 established the creation of a permanent food stamp program. According to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service website, quote: "Among the official purposes of the Food Stamp Act of 1964 were strengthening the agricultural economy and providing improved levels of nutrition among low-income households." Additionally, one of the goals of the program was to provide an "opportunity to obtain a low-cost nutritionally adequate diet."

In terms of how the pilot would work, it could look a number of different ways. This bill leaves decisions regarding what food(s) could fall under the pilot restriction or other program logistics up to experts, stakeholders, and those at the Department of Health Services that would be implementing the pilot after receiving federal approval in the form of a waiver. We wanted to provide some flexibility for those who know the program best.

Currently, some of the only things a FoodShare recipient cannot use their benefits to purchase are: nonfood items; beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, or tobacco; food that will be eaten in the store; food cooked and served hot at the store; vitamins and medicines. Therefore, there are no other restrictions, currently, on what foods cannot be purchased with these taxpayer funded benefits.



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We have restrictions and parameters in many other government run and funded programs; this should not be an exception.

Equally as important, is the significant health implications this bill could have on these FoodShare recipients. Obesity and other weight-related diseases are becoming an increasing problem not only across Wisconsin, but across the country. For example, a recent survey shows 30 percent of kids in Wisconsin ages 10 to 17 are overweight or obese, closely catching up to the adult obesity rate in our state. This bill strives to help change some of these alarming trends, and improve the quality of life those facing the challenge of limited food budgets. Healthier eating undoubtedly leads to healthier life outcomes—decreased risk for illnesses, and lessened health care costs.

Additionally, there has been movement at the federal level to improve the nutrition of this same population as well. For example, there were 2016 USDA Rule Changes which will now require stores participating in the federal food stamp program to carry a greater number of healthy food items. The rule specifies that participating stores will need to carry 84 food items, a significant increase from the previous minimum of 12. Kevin Concannon, USDA undersecretary for food, nutrition and consumer services at the time, said, “These are very implementable changes that are long overdue... this is a way of nudging access (to healthy foods) in the right direction.”

This bill is ultimately about two things: restoring the original intent of the FoodShare program, and working towards encouraging good health and healthier eating in some of our more vulnerable populations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today on some beneficial and important changes to our state’s FoodShare program. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

PLEASE OPPOSE ASSEMBLY BILL 530

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform

From: **Wisconsin Grocers Association | Midwest Products Association | Grocery Manufacturers Association | Can Manufacturers Association | Wisconsin Petroleum Marketers & Convenience Store Association | Kwik Trip | Wisconsin Beverage Association | National Grocers Association | American Frozen Food Institute | SNAC International | American Beverage Association | Food Marketing Institute**

Re: **Please Oppose Assembly Bill 530, relating to:** nutritional food pilot program under FoodShare and providing an exemption from rule-making procedures.

We oppose Assembly Bill 530 because it will:

- **Harm our businesses and threaten Wisconsin jobs** in the agricultural, manufacturing, bottling, distributing and retail industries.
- **Dramatically increase government power.** For the first time, Madison would be creating a definitive list of foods and beverages based on perceived nutritional value.
- **Put checkout clerks in a very difficult position of enforcing** what people can and cannot buy and pass the substantial cost of compliance onto retailers.

Together our organizations represent many of the men and women of Wisconsin who produce, manufacture, distribute and sell food and beverages in our state. Combined, we employ tens of thousands of workers and generate billions of dollars for Wisconsin's economy.

Though well-intended, Assembly Bill 530 is a threat to both job creation in our state and our right to decide for ourselves what to put in our grocery carts.

While we recognize the intent of this bill is to promote healthy choices, the unintended consequences of the proposal will do more harm than good.

This legislation would set the precedent of allowing state government to create a "food code" in requiring that the **Wisconsin Department of Health Services "identify specific foods, food products, and beverages, or general categories of foods, food products, and beverages, that do not have sufficient nutritional value and then restrict the use of benefits under a pilot program for those foods, food products, and beverages."**

And, how are the restrictions going to be enforced at the checkout counter? Are cashiers going to be asked to tell people what they can and cannot buy? At best that could lead to an embarrassing situation...at worst it could become a safety issue.

It is also important to note that not one dime will be saved by this bill. Instead, in the questionable event that Wisconsin were to receive a waiver from USDA, taxpayer dollars will have to pay to develop a "food code" administered by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Moreover, there is no provision to compensate retailers who would be asked to cover the substantial cost of compliance.

Importantly, the complex rules and regulations this proposal will create run 180 degrees counter to the current efforts by the governor and Legislature to reduce the regulatory burden on small businesses.

Again, we all support the good intent associated with Assembly Bill 530. Each of our industries invests considerable time and resources to encourage health and wellness. But, making checkout clerks into government-sanctioned food police is not the right method to accomplish the goal of healthy eating. **Please oppose Assembly Bill 530.**



To: Wisconsin Assembly Committee on Public Benefits
From: Nick George, Midwest Food Products Association
Date: October 17, 2017
Re: Assembly Bill 530, relating to nutritional food pilot program under the FoodShare Program – Opposed

The Midwest Food Products Association (MWFPA) is opposed to Assembly Bill 530, which requires the Department of Health Services to develop and conduct a pilot program to use FoodShare benefits for foods, food products, and beverages that have sufficient nutritional value. Such a program will be expensive to comply with and to administer, may cause job losses, will not save taxpayer money, and will not improve the health of SNAP recipients.

We realize that the intent of AB 530 is to promote healthy choices and to spend taxpayer dollars wisely. However, creating a black-list of foods determined not to be of “sufficient nutritional value” will be costly and lead to many unintended consequences.

For example, five years ago the USDA proposed to make the federal School Lunch Program healthier by limiting a serving of potatoes and peas to one-per-week. Nutritionist from around the country opposed this initiative as being unhealthy and detrimental to students. School administrators opposed the effort because it was too costly and impracticable to replace potatoes and peas with another vegetable. In the end the USDA withdrew the proposal.

Beyond nutrition, AB 530 may have a negative impact on jobs. The Midwest produces and processes many products that some officials may determine to not have “sufficient nutritional value” like the potato and pea example above or the current School Snack Program that does not allow cranberries, raisins or any other dried fruits or vegetables. Wisconsin is a leader in the production and processing of cheese, dairy products, cranberries, sweet corn, peas, green beans, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and various meat products. Which one of these will make the next list and be considered to have no sufficient nutritional value?

FoodShare is part of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which is the largest nutrition assistance program administered by the USDA reaching 50 million people in 2015. Thousands of people and millions of hours have gone into determining which products are eligible for the program. The program has its’ flaws and can always be improved but it is impracticable to ask the DHS to do a better job with its limited resources.

Though well-intentioned AB 530 will be costly to administer, opens nutrition programs to the subjective whims of bureaucrats, may hurts agricultural jobs in the Midwest and duplicates federal rules. We urge the committee to oppose AB 530.

Hunger Task Force Position Paper

Hunger Task Force Position

- AB 530 will be costly and inefficient for the State of Wisconsin to implement and maintain.
- AB 530 will increase bureaucracy and inefficiencies in the FoodShare program.
- AB 530 prescribes food choices to all food stamp recipients that have “sufficient nutritional value” without definition or evidence of need.
- AB 530 prescribes food choices for low-income households without regard to cultural preference or to ability to reach stores which sell a full complement of the limited food options.

Hunger Task Force OPPOSES Assembly Bill 530

BACKGROUND

FoodShare is Wisconsin’s name for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), traditionally called Food Stamps. SNAP is an entitlement program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), administered in Wisconsin by the Department of Health Services (DHS).

ANALYSIS

AB530 directs DHS to develop, after consultation with interested parties including food producers and sellers and health-related organizations, and conduct a pilot program for FoodShare benefits to be used for foods, food products, and beverages that have sufficient nutritional value. Under the pilot program, DHS shall identify specific foods, food products, and beverages, or general categories of foods, food products, and beverages, that do not have sufficient nutritional value and shall restrict the use of benefits under the pilot program for those foods, food products, and beverages. This modification to the FoodShare program is done without reference to practicality, efficacy, effectiveness or implementation and continuity costs. Additionally, there is no definition of “sufficient nutritional value” provided or guidance given on how it should be defined by DHS.

1. There has been no consideration given to the cultural food preferences of different racial or ethnic groups, or to the very real limitations on access to healthy food that confront many low-income households.
2. FoodShare is used by eligible low-income families through an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card called the Quest card. Purchases are scanned and totaled, the Quest card is swiped through an EBT reader, the purchaser enters a four digit PIN, and the cost of food items is deducted from the Quest account. The Quest card is federally mandated to be interoperable between U.S. States.



HUNGER TASK FORCE

FREE & LOCAL

Limiting the foods that can be purchased with FoodShare will require a significant upfront financial investment to modify the Quest EBT system by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. In the unlikely event that the USDA grants a waiver to allow this program to go into effect, it is doubtful that the federal government will share the cost of developing this EBT technology. Thus, putting the financial burden of overhauling a point-of-sale system on Wisconsin taxpayers.

3. FoodShare recipients are no more likely to consume soft drinks than higher-income individuals, and are less likely to consume sweets and salty snacks. FoodShare participants and persons with income over 130% of the poverty level did not differ significantly on the number of people who consumed at least one soft drink per day (61% vs. 59.2%).
4. Lower percentage of FoodShare participants reported consuming at least one serving of sweets per day (61.6% vs. 72.1%) and salty snacks (29.6% vs. 36.5%), than people with income over 130% of the poverty level.
5. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service must approve any limitations on food that can be purchased with SNAP / FoodShare. The USDA is on record opposing such limitations and has already rejected similar requests for waivers.

The USDA has programs in place that seek to improve the nutrition and health of SNAP recipients through health and nutrition education (SNAP-ED) rather than mandating what people eat. Increasing SNAP availability and incentives in Farmers' Markets is showing success in Michigan and other states across the country.

6. One of the benefits of the FoodShare program is it gets people out of the food pantry system and into the grocery store. Citizens should be able to choose what they can purchase and eat, and use the same check-out lane. Hunger Task Force works to feed hungry people with respect and dignity. Hunger does not respect age, sex, race or background. Many visitors to local pantries and soup kitchens never would have anticipated the unforeseen circumstances that put them in the position of asking for help. We do not believe that people struggling to feed themselves are second class citizens.

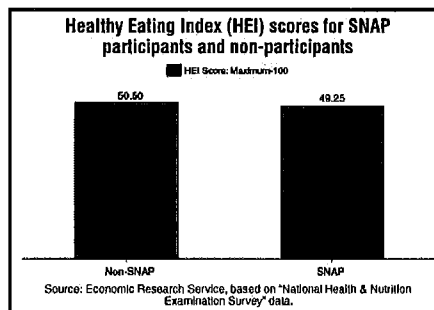


HUNGER TASK FORCE

FREE & LOCAL

FOODSHARE FACTS:

- Studies have consistently shown that participation in federal anti-hunger programs, such as SNAP, do not increase the likelihood of being overweight or obese.¹
- According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, fruits and vegetables, grain products, meats, and dairy products comprise almost 90 percent of the food that SNAP households buy.²
- SNAP participation has been found to reduce food insecurity for households.³
- Food insecurity has been found to have many negative impacts on the health of individuals including higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, and depression.⁴
- 100% of FoodShare benefits are paid by the federal government. Program administration is shared equally between the state and federal governments.⁵
- SNAP was shown to have “no discernible effect on consumption as measured by HEI [Healthy Eating Index] scores.” The negative effect on dark green/orange vegetable consumption was small but also statistically significant. However, the positive effect on fruit consumption was large and statistically significant.⁶
- SNAP participants show increased likelihood to consume whole fruits as it is more affordable and requires less preparation than other produce options.⁷
- SNAP participants do marginally worse on total HEI than comparable nonparticipants: 1.25 points lower, or about 2.5 percent of the mean for this group.⁸ This shows that SNAP participants have about



the same healthy-eating habits as non-SNAP participants.

- Empirical evidence suggests that subsidizing healthy foods rather than taxing unhealthy foods show reduced costs of cardiovascular disease.⁹

¹ [Food Stamps and Obesity: What do we know?](#) United States Department of Agriculture, March 2008.

² [Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.](#) Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 2013.

³ [Does SNAP decrease food insecurity?](#); USDA Economic Research Service Report Number 85, October 2009

⁴ Olson, C.M. (1999). [Nutritional and Health Outcomes Associated with Food Insecurity and Hunger.](#) The Journal of Nutrition, 129: 521-524.

⁵ [Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau "Food Share Wisconsin".](#) January 2011, pg. 5

⁶ [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Participation Leads to Modest Changes in Diet Quality,](#) ERR-147 p. 15

⁷ [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Participation Leads to Modest Changes in Diet Quality,](#) ERR-147 p. 24

⁸ [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Participation Leads to Modest Changes in Diet Quality,](#) ERR-147 p. 20

⁹ [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Participation Leads to Modest Changes in Diet Quality,](#) ERR-147 p. 24-25



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

P.O. Box 7222, Madison, Wisconsin 53707

DATE 10/17/17

TO: Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform
FR: The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

RE: Opposition to Assembly Bill 530, nutritional food pilot program under FoodShare

Chairperson Krug and Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform Members:

The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is comprised of over 30 statewide groups representing people with all disabilities and all ages, their family members, advocates and providers of disability services. We would like to bring to your attention some very important concerns regarding Assembly Bill 530 that we believe will significantly impact people with disabilities.

FoodShare is an important program for people with disabilities. According to the Department of Health Services, 25% of FoodShare recipients are either elderly, blind, or have a disability; and 46% of households receiving FoodShare benefits contain at least one individual that is, either elderly, blind, or has a disability.

AB 530 would limit the types of foods that may be purchased using FoodShare benefits. AB 530 would allow the Department of Health Services to create a pilot program to “restrict” the use of FoodShare benefits on specific non-nutritional foods or beverages. It is unclear if the use of “restrict” would result in a limit on the types of foods a person could buy or an all-out ban on “unhealthy food.” It is also unclear from the bill language where the liability for not meeting these new requirements would lie or what, if any, punitive measures would be taken against individual recipients that do not meet the new standards. We have strong concerns that AB 530 could result in people with disabilities losing access to food if they are unable to meet technical and complex criteria for using FoodShare benefits.

This bill creates extra barriers for individuals with disabilities attempting to access FoodShare benefits. In addition to applying for benefits and locating/finding transportation to a grocery store, individuals with disabilities would now be required to ensure that the foods they purchase meet specific nutritional criteria.

While we appreciate that this bill requires stakeholder involvement in the development of this new pilot program, we still have concerns about crafting a definitive list of foods that are not allowed for FoodShare recipients. Foods contain many components that can affect health, and healthy diets contain many foods. As a result, it is challenging to determine whether – and the

point at which – the presence of desirable nutrients outweighs the presence of nutrients to be avoided in ruling a food “in” or “out.” This could be particularly difficult to ascertain with some pre-packaged foods, which can be of particular need for people with disabilities. Some people with disabilities due to their physical or intellectual limitations have difficulty or cannot prepare entire meals “from scratch” but can independently utilize pre-packaged food items or items that can be microwaved. We believe this bill could jeopardize the autonomy of people with disabilities by making it more difficult for them to prepare meals independently.

A higher percentage of people with disabilities are of lower income and, therefore, more often live in “food deserts.” A “food desert” is an area with little or no access to large grocery stores that offer fresh, healthy and affordable foods--- foods that will most likely be “authorized” by AB 530. Instead of such stores, these urban and rural areas often contain only fast food restaurants and convenience stores. Physical access to large grocery stores can be difficult for people with disabilities of low incomes, particularly if the stores are distant, the store is not on a bus line, or if the consumer has no vehicle. Carrying fresh food from grocers can also be a challenge for individuals who must take public transit, walk long distances, or have other physical limitations.

Finally, many people with disabilities are on special diets that may or may not align with the traditional nutrition guidelines. For instance, people with PKU and some types of seizure disorders must eat high-fat or even exclusively-fat diets. People on gluten-free diets, which are sometimes recommended for children with autism, can only use very limited grain products. AB 530 does not take into account any specialized diets that people may adhere to for medical reasons.

Achieving dietary improvements among FoodShare recipients is a complex challenge and people with disabilities who utilize FoodShare have additional considerations that make this proposed legislation concerning. Survival Coalition supports legislation that works to address barriers to healthy food access, such as Assembly Bill 501. We cannot support AB 530 because we believe it creates barriers to accessing food. In addition, this bill would likely increase administrative costs for the Department of Health Services at a time when there are documented provider shortages throughout the health care community, which require additional funding to address. We believe that any additional state funding should be used to provide services directly to beneficiaries of FoodShare or other health care programs.

We ask that you oppose AB 530.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Survival Co-Chairs:

Maureen Ryan, moryan@charter.net; (608) 444-3842;
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October 16, 2017

Chair Scott Krug and The Hon. Committee Members
The Assembly Committee on Public Benefits Reform
c/o: Hannah Gibbs, Committee Clerk
State Capitol
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Re: AB 501 and AB 530

Dear Chair Krug and Committee Members:

We are writing to share our positions on the two bills – AB 501 and AB 530 – that will be heard in committee on October 17, 2017. Typically, we would submit separate letters but given the related nature of AB 501 and AB 530, we thought it would be useful to write about both of them together to compare and contrast these proposals aimed at increasing the purchase and consumption of healthful food in the FoodShare program.

Feeding Wisconsin is the state's association of the six regional Feeding America food banks. Together, through our food banks and their network of over 1,000 local food programs in every county of our state, we provided over 50 million meals to nearly 600,000 of our friends and neighbors in 2016. Our mission is to help our participating food banks, partners and stakeholders fight hunger, improve health, and strengthen communities.

Proper nutrition is key to good health and as hunger and food insecurity are essentially malnutrition problems due to the inability of people with low-incomes to access enough adequate, nutritious food, the idea at the core of both bills – how to help people with low-incomes eat more healthfully – should be lauded and promoted. Both AB 501 and AB 530 are pilot programs aimed to address this issue but each take a vastly different approach.

We support AB 501 for its positive, incentive based approach toward healthy eating and we oppose AB 530 for setting a framework for creating restrictions in the FoodShare program.

FoodShare is the Wisconsin name for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps), a federal nutrition assistance program that provides individuals and families living with low and no incomes with a modest monthly benefit (about \$110 per month, per person) to buy food at supermarkets, farmers markets, convenience stores, and megastores that sell groceries. These benefits are delivered on an EBT card and are strictly monitored by the state that administers the program, the federal government that authorizes the program and the major banks that facilitate the benefit delivery.

On a per calorie basis, healthy food costs more than less healthy, more calorically dense options. For many people, this is the key reason why eating healthfully on FoodShare is a challenge.

By implementing an incentive for healthy food purchases, as AB 501 aims to do, the state would not only increase the FoodShare benefit, addressing the core cost issue, but it would also target the increase at the healthy items in the produce section of supermarkets. This is an approach that has been proven to increase the consumption and spending on healthy food.



The Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) was a pilot program authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill and provided similar incentives for SNAP participants in Massachusetts from 2011 to 2012. The results were extremely encouraging. The study found that HIP participants consumed 26% more fresh fruits and vegetables and spent 11% more on these same products when compared to regular SNAP participants. The study and the final evaluation report can be found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/healthy-incentives-pilot-final-evaluation-report>

In contrast, AB 530 seeks to build a case for implementing restrictions in the FoodShare program by consulting with stakeholders and industry experts. Not only are restrictions ineffective at changing behavior, the restrictions that AB 530 would lead to could inadvertently increase the food costs for FoodShare participants due to the more expensive nature of healthy food items.

Additionally, by limiting FoodShare participant choices to a certain set of "healthy" items that have been created by a panel of "experts," the state would effectively be taking away the ability of moms and dads across our state to make the food choices that are right for them and their families and sending a message that the families on FoodShare are unfit to make these basic household decisions.

Numerous national studies have shown that FoodShare recipients' food purchasing and consumption patterns are just like non-recipients. Everyone makes sub-optimal food choices from time to time, not just the people on FoodShare. It's just that people who have low-incomes have less flexibility to avoid making poor food choices due to cost.

With limited resources to address the issue of healthy eating, the state should choose to more strategically invest public dollars to fund the healthy incentive pilot as proposed by AB 501. This type of positive intervention would incentivize healthy eating, address hunger, boost local economies, and begin to tackle the key issue that prevents people on FoodShare from eating more healthfully – cost.

Thank you for your time and careful consideration of our position on AB 501 and AB 530. Please do not hesitate to contact me at dalee@feedingwi.org or 608-960-4511 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



David Lee
Executive Director
Feeding Wisconsin



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P.O. Box 201
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Lisa Pugh, State Director
pugh@thearc.org
arcwi.org

October 17, 2017

To: Representative Krug, Chair
Members, Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform

From: Lisa Pugh, Executive Director

RE: Assembly Bills 501; 530 - FoodShare

The Arc Wisconsin is a statewide organization that advocates for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). We have 15 Wisconsin chapters and are connected to a network of more than 650 chapters across the country. The Arc is the oldest and largest disability advocacy organization in the nation.

Assembly bills 501 and 530 would make changes to the FoodShare program that will have a significant impact on individuals with disabilities. Recent analysis by the Legislative Fiscal Bureau indicates 24 percent of program participants are elderly, blind, or disabled individuals. Forty percent of households receiving FoodShare benefits contain at least one individual that is, either elderly, blind, or has a disability.

Identifying ways to support good health for people with I/DD is essential. There are significant and concerning health disparities between people with I/DD and their peers without disabilities. "These include a lack of access to health care, an absence of healthy foods including fresh fruits and vegetables, and deficiencies in exercise and wellness activities. Research shows that 5% of adults with I/DD report overall poor health, a marked difference as compared to the 1% of adults without disabilities answering the same question. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), adults with disabilities have a 57% higher rate of obesity than adults without disabilities and experience three times the risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancer as compared to the general population."¹

People with I/DD also do not have healthy eating habits - only 11 percent of people with I/DD report eating 5 or more servings of fruit or vegetables a day compared to 23 percent of the general population in our country. The reasons for this are quite complicated as we will explain further.

The Arc firmly believes that ignoring health disparities experienced by people with I/DD will not only exacerbate our inability to improve quality of life but also contribute to rising health care costs.

¹ The Arc HealthMeet Assessment Results: <http://www.thearc.org/file/Health-Assessment-Years-1-3-Technical-Report-FINAL.pdf>

However, with regard to AB 501 and AB 530 we advise caution: Limiting an individual's food choices can be extremely problematic. People with disabilities often already have diet restrictions that limit their food choices for medical reasons. They also face many barriers to living a healthy lifestyle and food choice is just one of them:

People with I/DD struggle with:

- access to transportation
- limited finances
- lack of education about healthy eating and food preparation.

People with I/DD are also often not completely in control of their food purchases, choices and preparation as they depend on support professionals for many of these tasks.

A higher percentage of people with disabilities have lower incomes and, therefore have difficulty affording more expensive foods. They are more likely to live in "food deserts" with limited access to the type of grocery stores that offer fresh, healthy foods at affordable prices. Because many people with disabilities do not drive and rely on public transportation, this creates additional expenses and barriers if stores are distant or not on bus lines. For these reasons, we oppose the restrictions put in place through AB 530, believing they ultimately will be harmful to people with disabilities.

Providing financial incentives for certain food purchases (as proposed through the AB 501 pilot), is a promising strategy, but may not result in sustainable change. If the Assembly goes the route of a pilot program in AB 501, The Arc Wisconsin strongly suggests adding an educational component.

The Arc's recent investment in health education for people with I/DD has included use of an evidence-based program - *HealthMatters* - that has proven results. The program uses hands-on instruction for people with disabilities in everything from healthy food choices, to grocery shopping, food preparation and exercise. We have found that without these educational supports to change habits for people with disabilities, simply addressing the costs of food is not enough.

Currently The Arc Wisconsin has three local chapters - The Arc of Greater Columbia County, The Arc of Racine and The Arc Fond du Lac - each implementing this curriculum with co-horts of 45 individuals with disabilities to improve their health and track their outcomes. The Arc Racine will graduate a class of transition age youth in a few weeks.

A research report authored by The Arc of the United States followed more than 1700 people with I/DD who completed this training. People lost weight, improved their BMI, lowered blood pressure and, most importantly, reported making lifestyle changes. Three out of four participants (76%) reported using the information they learned to make healthier lifestyle choices.

Achieving the outcomes the Legislature desires with reforms to the FoodShare program should involve a comprehensive, respectful and thoughtful approach for the people with disabilities who depend upon the program. A pilot project offers the ability to experiment and get it right. We urge you to consider the significant barriers these individuals face in accessing healthy foods and the support they may need to live a healthier, higher quality life.