



January 30, 2024

Joint Committee on Agriculture
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Room 413-A
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in support of S.85 / H.150 An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program

Dear Chair Schmid, Vice Chair Comerford, Vice Chair Blais, and members of the Committee:

The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) is pleased to offer this written testimony in support of S.85/H.150, An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program.

GBFB serves over 600,000 people in need of food across Eastern Massachusetts every month, and many of our food distribution partners are reporting more neighbors in need of food now than during the height of the pandemic, in large part due to affordability and cost of living in Massachusetts. **Families are struggling to keep food on the table, and according to our research, one in three individuals in Massachusetts are facing food insecurity and those numbers are persisting currently.** The charitable food system is doing what it can to meet the demand, but cash assistance must keep up with the current cost of living to better support families' basic needs.

An integral part of our mission is providing healthy and nutritious food to our clients across Eastern Massachusetts - which is why GBFB has a Nutrition Policy administered by our registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) on staff who work closely with our Food Acquisition Team to abide by this policy. GBFB also has a five-person Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach team and is an official SNAP outreach provider. We recognize that SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger and how access to SNAP enables access to programs such as the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP).

Ninety-four percent of all distributed food that GBFB dietitians can rank meets the highest nutritional standards, and we prioritize acquisition and distribution of perishable product, including produce, protein, and dairy items. We also prioritize supporting local farms through the

management of the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP). As part of our commitment to distributing healthy and fresh, local, food, we support and recognize the integral role that HIP serves in this overall effort.

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) provides a dollar-for-dollar match, up to a monthly limit dependent on household size, for SNAP dollars spent on fruits and vegetables purchased at participating farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs across the Commonwealth. The bill will codify the program in statute and create a trust fund that would be able to accept public and private funding.

The impact on families, farms, and the local economy since HIP's launch in April 2017 has been tremendously impactful for households facing food insecurity and for local farmers, with over 277,000 households participating. Many other states look to Massachusetts as a leader, as one of the only states with a statewide nutrition incentive program. Passing this bill into law this session would demonstrate the state's continued support of HIP, which is especially important this year during the ongoing 2023 Farm Bill negotiations.

The Commonwealth has invested heavily in extensive program operating infrastructure, management, and outreach. This legislation is needed to protect that investment, and to ensure that the program and a funding source exist in statute so that it will continue to operate. This no-cost bill has been reported favorably from first reading in the last three General Courts, and we urge you to do the same this session.

We appreciate the Committee taking up this issue and urge you to consider it in the context of Massachusetts' food system as a whole. We respectfully request that the Committee pass this bill favorably and vote in favor of the bill when it comes to the floor.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Kate Adams

Kate Adams

Public Policy Manager
The Greater Boston Food Bank

