



SMART GROWTH AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

May 16, 2017

Senator Jennifer L. Flanagan, Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House, Room 312D
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Kay Khan, Chair
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House, Room 146
Boston, MA 0213

Dear Senator Flanagan and Representative Khan:

I am writing in support of H.101, *An Act Improving Public Health through a Common Application for Core Food, Health and Safety-net Programs*, filed by Representative Jay Livingstone. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) serves as the Regional Planning Agency serving the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns in the Metropolitan Boston region, which includes roughly half the state's population and two-thirds of the state's jobs. We are committed to smart growth and regional collaboration.

One out of nine people in Massachusetts are food insecure, meaning they regularly struggle to have enough food for themselves and their families. This issue is worse for children, where one out of six is affected by food insecurity.ⁱ Poverty drives food insecurity, and food insecurity is linked to numerous health issues and poor life outcomes. People of color, older adults, and people who are disabled have higher rates of poverty, and as a result also experience greater food insecurity.ⁱⁱ In recent years, food insecurity rates in Massachusetts have begun improving, but are still worse than they were before the 2008 recession.ⁱⁱⁱ State and federal programs have facilitated more people getting the food they need, but they are not reaching everyone that is eligible. This bill seeks to change this by increasing efficiencies, opportunities, and participation, and it advances MAPC's and the Commonwealth's food policy priorities.

An Act Improving Public Health through a Common Application for Core Food, Health and Safety-net Programs would establish a common application for individuals who receive state benefits. It would allow those individuals who are eligible to simultaneously apply for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other income support and benefit programs when that person applies for or renews any single state application, like MassHealth coverage. The bill addresses the fact that an estimated 680,000 people who are receiving MassHealth are likely also eligible for the SNAP program, but are not enrolled in the SNAP program. It will deliver benefits to eligible individuals (including over 100,000 elders), support them in meeting their basic needs; lower healthcare costs; and generate an estimated \$1.5 billion

in economic stimulus.^{iv} This legislation creates a simple fix to capture those individuals who are likely eligible for benefits but are not yet receiving them.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. If you or your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Lizzi Weyant, MAPC's Government Affairs Manager at (617) 933-0703 or eweyant@mapc.org.

Sincerely,



Marc Draisen
Executive Director

cc. Senate President Stanley C. Rosenberg
Speaker Robert A. DeLeo
Chairwoman Karen E. Spilka
Chairman Brian S. Dempsey
Senator Sal N. DiDomenico
Representative Jay D. Livingstone

ⁱ *Map the Meal Gap* (2016), Feeding America.

ⁱⁱ *Massachusetts Food Insecurity: Landscape and Innovation* (2014), Tufts University.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Map the Meal Gap* (2016), Feeding America.

^{iv} *Fact Sheet: An Act Improving Public Health through a Common Application for Core Food Health and Safety-net Programs*, MLRI, MPHA