



MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY

Every physician matters, each patient counts.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H.222
AN ACT RELATIVE TO AN AGRICULTURAL HEALTHY INCENTIVES PROGRAM
BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES
September 16, 2025

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) wishes to be recorded in support of H.222, *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program.*

The MMS is a professional association of over 23,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to provide them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible. The MMS has long supported policies that advance health equity, address the social determinants of health, and promote preventive care. Our organizational policy explicitly supports programs that help low-income Massachusetts residents purchase healthy foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables. The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) is a proven tool for improving nutritional access and long-term public health outcomes, while also supporting local agriculture and bolstering community food systems. The MMS therefore supports this legislation, which would codify and strengthen HIP, ensuring that it remains a sustainable, year-round effort to improve access to healthy food for low-income residents.

Currently, more than 660,000 households, representing approximately 1.1 million Massachusetts residents, receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.¹ Many of these residents are from historically marginalized backgrounds and face financial barriers to accessing nutritious food. HIP provides critical relief by offering an immediate reimbursement for fruits and vegetables purchased at participating farmers markets, farm stands, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, up to a monthly cap. This reimbursement is automatically credited to recipients' Electronic Benefit Transfer

¹ Department of Transitional Assistance. DTA PERFORMANCE SCORECARD | January 2025.
Published online January 2025. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/performance-scorecard-january-2025-0/download>

(EBT) cards, enabling families to purchase additional healthy food without any extra enrollment process or administrative burden.

By stacking HIP reimbursements on top of monthly SNAP benefits, households are empowered to buy fresh, locally grown produce effectively at no cost. For example, a SNAP recipient who spends ten dollars on eligible fruits or vegetables receives that same ten dollars instantly reimbursed.² HIP benefits can be used at farm stands, outdoor and indoor farmers markets, and CSAs, providing year-round access to unprocessed, nutrient-rich foods. Eligible HIP items include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products—cornerstones of a balanced diet associated with lower rates of chronic illness. Research from the HIP pilot program demonstrated that participants consumed significantly more fruits and vegetables than nonparticipants—an increase that was both statistically significant and nutritionally meaningful.³ As of February 2025, approximately 187,000 Massachusetts households used HIP benefits, underscoring the program’s popularity and importance to community health.⁴

However, recent budget shortfalls have forced sharp reductions to HIP funding. As of December 2024, the maximum monthly HIP benefit has been cut to just \$20 per household, regardless of family size, down from previous levels of \$40 to \$80 per month.⁵ These reductions have already limited the program’s ability to operate year-round and to include additional farmers and vendors. For families already struggling to afford nutritious food, this loss of purchasing power will directly undermine health and exacerbate diet-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular illness.

Codifying HIP in statute through this legislation would establish a stable funding framework and ensure that the Department of Transitional Assistance, in partnership with the Departments of Agricultural Resources and Public Health, can operate the program sustainably and equitably. The bill’s provisions for prioritizing underserved areas, improving outreach, and maintaining transparency through annual public reporting are vital for maximizing public health impact and reducing health disparities. For physicians, the

² How to Use the Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP). <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/how-to-use-the-massachusetts-healthy-incentives-program-hip#:~:text=Example:HIP%20toward%20your%20monthly%20cap>.

³ Polacsek M, Moran A, Thorndike AN, Boulos R, Franckle RL, Greene JC, Blue DJ, Block JP, Rimm EB. A Supermarket Double-Dollar Incentive Program Increases Purchases of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Among Low-Income Families With Children: The Healthy Double Study. *J Nutr Educ Behav*. 2018 Mar;50(3):217-228.e1. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2017.09.013. Epub 2017 Nov 7. Erratum in: *J Nutr Educ Behav*. 2020 Aug;52(8):826-827. doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2020.05.010. PMID: 29126661; PMCID: PMC6247420. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6247420/#:~:text=25,per%20month%20more%20on%20F&V>.

⁴ Department of Transitional Assistance. Healthy Incentives Program Monthly Update | February 2025. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/healthy-incentives-program-fact-sheet-february-2025-pdf/download>

⁵ Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) - Program Changes | Boston.gov. City of Boston. November 27, 2024. <https://www.boston.gov/news/healthy-incentives-program-hip-program-changes#:~:text=What's%20Changing?,access%20points%20in%20their%20communities>.

connection between nutrition and health outcomes is clear and incontrovertible. The Healthy Incentives Program is a simple, effective, and equitable intervention that improves diets, reduces disease burden, and strengthens local economies.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this legislation. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.