

Organization names

DATE

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
Executive Chamber
New York State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

For kids and families in New York, autumn evokes images of apple picking, orchards and fresh foods. However, it is also a reminder that far too many New Yorkers don't have access to fresh, healthy foods, particularly in underserved areas. New data from the US Department of Agriculture estimate over 7.6 million of your constituents are food insecure, meaning they lack access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Limited access to fresh, healthy food has been linked to chronic disease and poor health, including high rates of heart disease, certain types of cancer, Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol¹, all of which are major cost drivers to New York's Medicaid program and our health system overall. In a recent report, the state's health department stated that diabetes has reached epidemic levels, with one out of every 12 adult New Yorkers being diagnosed.²

Many neighborhoods in both Upstate and Downstate New York do not have access to grocery stores or other markets with healthy food options. The problem is more prevalent in low-income neighborhoods which have 50% fewer supermarkets than the wealthiest neighborhoods.³ These stores also play a central role in our state's economy. They serve as anchors in communities since families prefer to live near them, homes are built around them and other businesses are developed nearby. Further, grocery stores and other food markets provide many jobs and support local agriculture by selling products from farms and other related businesses in their regions.

For the past five years, New York has offered grants and loans to renovate or build new food markets in underserved areas, through the state's Healthy Food and Healthy Communities Fund. While the program has been a success, the state's investment has depleted. We believe now is the time to revamp the program to better meet the varying needs of upstate and downstate communities.

We respectfully urge that as part of your SFY 2016-17 Executive Budget, **\$15 million in state funding be allocated for the creation of an economic revitalization package to improve access to healthy foods in underserved areas with a focus on renovating or building food markets.** The package should require a public-private partnership with state funds being matched by private industry. Additionally, in order to meet the varied needs of New York communities, we respectfully ask that an

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General. *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Office of the Surgeon General, 2007. Available at: http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/obesity/fact_adolescents.html

² See New York State Prevention Agenda 2013-2017, Development of the Prevention Agenda 2013-2017, new York State Health Assessment 2012, Contributing Causes of Health Challenges, pages 23 and 26, available at www.health.ny.gov/prevention/prevention_agenda/2013-2017/docs/challenges.pdf.

³ Powell, Lisa M., Sandy Slater, Donka Mirtcheva, Yanjun Bao, and Frank J. Chaloupka. "Food Store Availability and Neighborhood Characteristics in the United States." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 44.3 (2007): 189-95

additional \$3 million in state funding be dedicated to improving healthy food options in small retail settings including convenience stores, bodegas and corner stores.

As you may be aware, the infrastructure for such an initiative already exists through a highly successful public-private partnership whereby Goldman Sachs provided a 2:1 match on state funding for a Healthy Food and Healthy Communities Fund created in 2009 (section 16-s of the Urban Development Corporation Law). The funding, totaling \$30 million was provided to eligible organizations in the form of loans and grants for supermarkets, grocery stores, farmers markets and other food retailers to increase access to healthy foods in underserved communities.

The benefits of a healthy food financing program have been demonstrated in New York. The funds have supported projects in urban and rural areas throughout the state including Broome County, Buffalo, the Hudson Valley, New York City, Rochester, and Syracuse. Furthermore:

- Twenty projects were funded across our state which leveraged a total of \$155 million in private and public capital from local communities.
- 1,154 direct jobs were created or preserved through the program.
- Many of these projects participate in Pride of New York or otherwise source goods from local farmers.

With the existing state and private match funds now depleted, we believe there is an opportunity to build on the State's strong track record and create a full package that can be even more successful by adapting its reach and focus.

We recommend the package be expanded to ensure smaller, neighborhood markets like bodegas can receive access to funding for needed refrigeration and retrofits to be able to offer produce and other healthy foods. These are just a few examples of the new direction that an economic revitalization package could take, focused on improving the health of New Yorkers while expanding access to New York products, creating jobs and revitalizing communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this important Executive Budget request. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations further with your office. Please contact Julie Hart at the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network at 518.505.7833 or Julie.hart@cancer.org for further information.

Sincerely,

Organization & names listed here

Cc: Howard Zemsky, President & CEO of Empire State Development; Commissioner of the New York State Department of Economic Development
Howard A. Zucker, M.D., J.D., Commissioner of Health
Richard Ball, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets
Andrew Kennedy, Deputy Director of State Operations to the Governor
Paul Francis, Deputy Secretary for Health to the Governor
Pat Hooker, Deputy Secretary for Food and Agriculture for the Governor