

ACT 177

S.B. NO. 512

A Bill for an Act Relating to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Incentives.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is an integral part of a healthy diet and central to the prevention of obesity and chronic disease. The legislature also finds that every community should have access to fresh and healthy dietary options, but the high cost of fresh produce often makes that difficult. This challenge is felt acutely by participants

in the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program, a low-income population that struggles to afford healthy food.

The legislature also finds that the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has placed a financial strain on many local families, including farmers, ranchers, and many involved in Hawaii’s agricultural industry. Multiple COVID-19 restrictions and the drop in customer sales among retailers and other businesses across the State have led to decreased purchases from local farmers and ranchers, with some having to consider scaling back operations or downsizing their workforce.

The legislature further finds that through the national double up food bucks program, Hawaii has the opportunity to expand access to healthy foods for low-income residents who are eligible for supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits. Currently implemented in more than twenty-eight states, the double up food bucks program provides matching federal grant moneys to state programs that incentivize the use of supplemental nutrition assistance program benefits for the purchase of fresh produce. The double up food bucks program is a viable model that supports local farmers; helps low-income families who receive double the purchasing power for healthy, Hawaii-grown produce; and benefits Hawaii by keeping dollars in the local economy.

The enactment of Act 153, Session Laws of Hawaii 2019, created the Hawaii healthy food incentive program, also known as the double up food bucks program. The program provides a dollar-for-dollar match to supplemental nutrition assistance program beneficiaries who purchase locally-grown fruits and vegetables at participating farmers’ markets, grocery stores, and community-supported agriculture projects. Funding from the legislature has allowed community groups, led by the Food Basket on Hawaii island, to obtain matching federal funds. Additionally, local funders have also stepped up to amplify the impact of this program to ensure that it can reach communities around the State.

The purpose of this Act is to expand the double up food bucks program administered by the Hawaii department of agriculture to make fresh fruits and vegetables and healthy proteins sold at farmers’ markets, grocery stores, and other direct food retailers accessible to families or individuals who reside in this State and who receive assistance through the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program.

SECTION 2. Section 141-13, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by amending subsection (b) to read as follows:

“(b) Participants in the Hawaii healthy food incentive program who are beneficiaries of the supplemental nutrition assistance program shall receive a dollar-for-dollar match [~~of up to \$10 per visit, per day,~~] to be used exclusively for the purchase of Hawaii-grown fresh fruits and vegetables, or healthy proteins that are eligible for supplemental nutrition assistance as determined by the program, at a farmers’ market, farm stand, mobile market, community-supported agriculture site, grocery store, or other direct food retailer that participates in the supplemental nutrition assistance program.”

SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

(Approved July 2, 2021.)