



March 11, 2021

To: Senate Committee on Ways and Means and Agriculture and Environment

The Honorable Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
The Honorable Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

The Honorable Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
The Honorable Senator Clarence K. Nishihara, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment

RE: Strong Support for SB 512

Hrg: March 12, 2021 at 10:00 am, House conference room 325 Via Videoconference

The Hawaii Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 400 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawaii through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy. Issues around social justice and equity in areas that extend beyond the traditional context of health (e.g., education, digital equity, cultural sensitivity), can have profound impacts on health equity and well-being. Therefore, as stewards of public health, HPHA is advocating for equity in all policies.

HPHA strongly supports SB 512, which improves access to healthy food options by making fresh, locally grown produce more affordable for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. Specifically, SB 512 will: (1) remove the \$10 per visit per day cap on the dollar-for-dollar match received by SNAP beneficiaries under the Hawaii Healthy Food Incentive Program (also known as Double Up Food Bucks Program); (2) allow healthy proteins as eligible purchases under the program; (3) makes an appropriation to the department of agriculture to expand funding for the program. This benefits low-income individuals and families in our community who need assistance, while also supporting local farmers and investing in our local economy.

SNAP is a vital resource for those with low-income and experience food insecurity. Food insecurity is directly related to poor health outcomes and contributes to health inequities. Specifically, individuals who experience food insecurity have a higher risk for conditions such as malnutrition and obesity due to low-nutrition options with less expense processed foods versus access to fresh foods and healthy proteins.¹ In December 2020, there were over 189,000 low-income SNAP recipients in the state. This is a 20% increase from the year before, demonstrating a growing need in our population.² As stewards of public health, HPHA is an advocate for health equity for vulnerable populations. Access to healthy food options is a key policy intervention to ensure health equity.¹

Increasing access to healthy food and supporting local agriculture is good for public health and the local economy. We strongly support SB 512 and respectfully ask that you pass this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue affecting members of our community.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Holly Kessler'.

Holly Kessler
Executive Director
Hawaii Public Health Association

References:

1. Kumanyika, S.K. A Framework for Increasing Equity Impact in Obesity Prevention Am J Public Health. 2019; 109, (10): 1350-1357
2. Action Alert: DA BUX Double Up Food Bucks. Hawaii Public Health Institute. <https://www.hiphi.org/dufb2021/?emci=d4280b9e-5a81-eb11-85aa-00155d43c992&emdi=7de334dc-e981-eb11-85aa-00155d43c992&ceid=2353485>. Accessed March 10, 2021.

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