

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Human Services  
For HB 2983

Compiled on: Tuesday, March 28, 2023 3:39 PM

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Hearing Date: March 28, 2023 8:00 AM

Clayton Travis

Texas Pediatric Society, Partnership for a Healthy Texas  
Austin, TX

On behalf of the Texas Pediatric Society and the Partnership for a Healthy Texas, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2983. We strongly support HB 2983 and Rep. Oliverson’s efforts to create programs that help Medicaid patients access healthy and nutritious foods.

Food insecurity is a major issue in our state. Over 15 percent of households report experiencing difficulty accessing sufficient food and over 20 percent of households with children. Food insecurity is also a key driver of health, and as a result, driver of health care costs. The Center for Disease Control suggests that food insecurity adds about \$2 billion annually to health care costs in Texas.

How do food and food insecurity impact health? Take a child whose family lacks access to a convenient and affordable grocery store or food pantry, whose family relies instead on fast food or highly processed foods. Children with unhealthy diets are not only at greater risk of malnutrition, harming their cognitive and physical growth over time, but also of developing obesity, diabetes and other chronic health conditions. Likewise, adults with chronic disease, such as diabetes or heart disease, who lack ready access to healthy foods, have higher rates of medical complications. Similarly, if a child has already been diagnosed with a chronic disease, such as kidney failure, cystic fibrosis, or even something as common as asthma or eczema, lack of access to healthy, affordable foods can significantly worsen their disease state and make traditional medical interventions less effective. A physician can prescribe medications to control the illness and educate their patients on the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. However, if they reside in a “food desert” – a community without easy access to healthy foods – then no amount of education or medication can overcome this factor.

Pediatricians are highly aware of these connections. We see the results in our offices every day. This connection between food and health is so significant that the AAP recommends screening for food insecurity at every well child visit, deeming it the “Hunger Vital Sign.”

Healthy food is good medicine. In Texas, existing food as medicine programs have shown success in reducing food insecurity and improving health outcomes. Collaborations between clinical and community services to improve access to healthy foods have resulted in significant decreases in obesity, diabetes severity, and high blood pressure. Benefits extend beyond alleviating the acute food and health needs by helping families build skills that last a lifetime. Participants in food as medicine programs have shown increased consumption of fruit and vegetables by school aged children even after the intervention ends. These long-term outcomes reduce chronic disease, keeping Texans healthy, and health care costs low.

Rebecca Galinsky  
Protect TX Fragile Kids  
Arlington, TX

We register in favor of this bill.

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Hearing Date: March 28, 2023 8:00 AM

Jaclyn Albin, Dr.

Self (physician)

Bedford, TX

As a culinary medicine physician and nutrition expert, I strongly support this bill. Food (a poor quality diet) is the top risk factor for early death and drives most chronic disease. Utilizing food as a covered benefit will prove to be cost-effective and ultimately reduce costs for the state and federal investments in the Medicaid program. Other states are much further along on covering medical nutrition assistance with great results. Increasingly, payors are seeing the benefits, with one recent example here from NEJM Catalyst -= <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.22.0351>

EVE MARGOLIS

self

Austin, TX

Absolutely NOT! The guidelines of who would get this assistance is very particular,

AAa county:

(A)AAwith a population greater than 65,000; (B)AAthat is located on an international border;and(C)AAin which at least one World Birding Center site is located.

The extent of personal information that is required to be documented is unnecessary and intrusive.