

Amy Nunn, ScD
Executive Director
Rhode Island Public Health Institute

[DATE]

Dear Dr. Nunn,

As a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) in Rhode Island, I am pleased to write this letter of support for the effort the Rhode Island Public Health Institute (RIPHI) is leading to make healthy food more accessible and affordable for the lowest income residents in RI. I strongly support the expansion of Rhode Island's successful SNAP incentive programs into retail settings, where the majority of Rhode Islanders shop for food, as this will ensure that the program is accessible to more residents in need.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, low-income Rhode Islanders have struggled more than ever to access affordable, healthful foods. Currently about one quarter of local families are without adequate nutrition. SNAP incentives encourage the use of SNAP benefits for healthy food, helping families stretch their food budgets further while improving dietary quality.

We know that the state prioritizes reducing hunger and food insecurity. Governor Raimondo prioritized supporting RI's food system and we are optimistic that Governor McKee will support these priorities as well. One effort that works to reduce hunger is to expand the SNAP incentive program into retail settings throughout the state. To fund this initiative, RIPHI is advocating for H5715, introduced by Representative Jean Phillipe Barros, and S327, introduced by Senator Valerie Lawson, that would implement a \$0.015 cent per oz tax on sugary drinks with the revenue generated funding a Retail SNAP Incentive Program (RSIP) in Rhode Island.

[HERE YOU CAN USE OUR TEXT BELOW OR INSERT YOUR OWN TEXT TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR ROLE IN FOOD ACCESS WORK IN RI AND WHY YOU SUPPORT BOTH RSIP AND THE SUGARY DRINKS TAX]

As a nutrition professional, I work with many low-income Rhode Islanders, helping them to access food when needed. Most Americans do not meet recommended intakes for fruit and vegetable intake, despite their role in the treatment and prevention of chronic disease. The RSIP would increase access to fruits and vegetables to patients at higher risk of chronic disease, helping to improve the public health of Rhode Islanders. Approving this bill would improve the nutrition status of our communities with the potential for reducing healthcare costs.

Given the health impacts of sugary beverages, another benefit of this bill would be to allow us to reduce some of the medical and insurance costs associated with treating diet-related chronic

disease. Specifically, consumption of sugary drinks has a detrimental effect on public health by increasing risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes (1) coronary heart disease (1), and fatty liver disease (3). Sugary drinks are the largest single source of added sugars in the United States, and account for almost half of all added sugars consumed in the United States (4). Average sugar intake has increased substantially over time (6) and, despite a recent decline, still exceeds federal recommendations to limit added sugars to less than 10% of daily calories (4).

As mentioned above, sugary drinks can increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It is estimated that over 79,000 Rhode Islanders have diabetes (5), and that a person with diabetes has an average medical cost of \$16,752 per year, \$9,601 of which, is related to diabetes (6). Diabetes is a devastating disease that can lead to complications such as cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, visual problems, infections, and amputations. Placing a sugary beverage tax would be an important step toward diminishing the human and economic costs of diabetes in the State of Rhode Island.

By funding a retail SNAP incentive, we can create a foundation for future generations of healthy people and families in Rhode Island. I look forward to collaborating with the Rhode Island Public Health Institute as we work together to expand access to healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables to all Rhode Islanders with the passing of a sugary drinks tax. SNAP incentives are a crucial element of the Rhode Island Food System and I offer my support in the expansion and development of this program.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[YOUR JOB TITLE IF APPLICABLE, YOUR ORGANIZATION]

References

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2. Huang C, Huang J, Tian Y, Yang X, Gu D. Sugar sweetened beverages consumption and risk of coronary heart disease: a meta-analysis of prospective studies. *Atherosclerosis* 2014;234:11-6.
3. Ma J, Fox CS, Jacques PF, et al. Sugar-sweetened beverage, diet soda, and fatty liver disease in the Framingham Heart Study cohorts. *J Hepatol* 2015;63:462-9.
- 4 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Eighth Edition.
5. <https://health.ri.gov/data/diabetes/#:~:text=Rhode%20Island%20Numbers%202017,represents%20an%20additional%2024%2C800%20people>.

6. <https://www.diabetes.org/resources/statistics/cost-diabetes>