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MillCityGrows.org

October 24, 2024

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**It is essential to the wellbeing of our neighbors, families, and community members, that the Massachusetts legislature immediately fund a supplemental budget of \$10 million for Fiscal Year 2025 to fund the Healthy Incentives Program.**

Since 2017 the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) has provided SNAP users with a \$40, \$60, or \$80 reimbursement each month for local produce purchased from participating farmers markets, farm stands or CSA's. On October 17th, the Department of Transitional Assistance, based on a projected budget shortfall of \$10M, decided to reduce families' HIP benefits by half or more until the end of Fiscal Year 2025 (June 30th). This means that **families who have been relying on the HIP benefit to supply \$40/month or more of fresh fruits and vegetables to their households will only have \$20/month.** It additionally means that farmers, farmers markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and CSA's that have built their enterprises around this benefit will take a significant financial loss over the next 6 months.

**We believe that HIP is critical to improving food security and public health in Lowell.** Mill City Grows' 2022 Lowell Community Food Assessment showed that 35% of Lowellians experience food insecurity ([LCFA 2022](#)) and that the biggest barrier to accessing food is affordability. Barriers to accessing fresh, nutritious foods contribute directly to diet-related health conditions in our community. Among Lowell Community Health Center patients (2020), fully one-quarter (25.98%) had hypertension, 13% were diagnosed with diabetes, and 10% have asthma, which can be triggered or exacerbated by some additives in processed foods. Food insecurity and chronic diseases are higher in Lowell's Southeast Asian and Latinx communities, sometimes twice as high as in White households.

**In Lowell the usage of HIP has increased 150% since 2020** through advocacy and education about this benefit. HIP, combined with mobile markets, farmers markets, CSA's, food is medicine programs, outreach, and education, is a primary strategy to improve food security and public health in our city. **Drastically reducing this critical benefit will lead to increased food insecurity, illness, and great harm to our neighbors.** HIP also supports 285 participating Massachusetts farmers at farmers markets, mobile markets, and farm stands around the state. There are 25 farmers that run SNAP CSA programs, 38 farmers markets, 12 mobile markets that operate at 109 stops, and 59 farmers that operate 66 farm stands that are open and accept HIP in December.

We recognize and thank our elected officials who are already striving to pass this emergency funding. **We urgently ask all members of the state legislature, as well as Governor Healey, to take swift and decisive action to fully fund HIP in Fiscal Year 2025 with a supplemental budget of \$10 million, and to continue to fund it appropriately in future budgets to ensure this popular and critical program continues to help our communities thrive.**

With much gratitude,

Ali Jacobs, Dai Kim & Courtney McSparron  
*Co-Executive Directors of Mill City Grows*

*Mill City Grows is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.*



**Co-signed by Elected Officials:**

Edward J. Kennedy  
Massachusetts State Senator  
1<sup>st</sup> Middlesex District

Rodney Elliott  
Massachusetts State Representative  
16<sup>th</sup> Middlesex District

Vanna Howard  
Massachusetts State Representative  
17<sup>th</sup> Middlesex District

Lowell City Council

**Co-signed by Community Partners:**

Elizabeth Almeida  
Owner/Farmer  
Fat Moon Mushrooms

Jane Calvin  
Executive Director  
Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust

Deborah Callery  
Executive Director  
Merrimack Valley Food Bank

Sothea Chiemruom  
Executive Director  
Cambodian Mutual Assistance  
Association

Child of God Sanctuary

Nancy Coan  
Director  
Lowell Alliance

Steven Fischer  
Executive Director  
Regional Environmental Council of  
Central MA (REC)

Sophie Hansen  
Director of Government Relations  
and External Affairs  
Vinfen

Tara Hong  
Candidate for Massachusetts State  
Representative

Christopher Horn  
Owner/Farmer  
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Diego Leonardo  
Executive Director  
Latinx Community Center for  
Empowerment

Sue Levine  
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Lowell Community Health Center

Chris Offerman  
Coordinating Committee  
Solidarity Lowell

Dan Rivera  
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Coalition for a Better Acre

Caroline Rowe  
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International Institute of New  
England

Dara Sok  
The Federation for Children  
With Special Needs

Usha Thakrar  
Executive Director  
Boston Area Gleaners

Enrique Vargas  
On behalf of The Community Food  
Partnership of Lowell

Kirsten White  
Operations Manager  
Three Rivers Farmers Alliance