



Alimente

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May 14, 2026

TO: House Finance Committee
Chair Abney and Honorable Members of the Committee
SUBJECT: SUPPORT (H7258) - Bonus Bucks Appropriations Authorization

My name is Jason Kashdan. I'm a registered dietitian and the founder of Alimente, an equity-focused nutrition and food policy strategy practice in Providence. I'm also a Ward 3 City Council candidate. I'm writing in strong support of H7258 and urge the Committee to fund the program at the full \$200,000 requested.

My nutrition counseling approach is grounded in structural determinants of health. I see firsthand the profound impact that access to nutritious food have on health outcomes, particularly among vulnerable populations. Nutrition programs prevent diet-related chronic disease and improve food insecurity. Despite their critical role in supporting public health, these programs are weakening. Federal H.R. 1 cuts have removed vital support for Rhode Islanders' basic needs, including reducing SNAP benefits that make sure all Rhode Islanders can access healthy food.

Farm Fresh Rhode Island's Bonus Bucks program is one of the highest-leverage public investments Rhode Island makes in nutrition security. The program provides a 100% SNAP match at farmers markets statewide. Between 2015 and 2022 alone, it moved \$1.3 million in SNAP/EBT sales and \$1.1 million in Bonus Bucks incentives directly to local farms, empowering more than 13,450 Rhode Islanders to buy more fresh produce. Few state-funded nutrition programs can show that kind of cost-per-household reach.

Farm Fresh RI has operated the program for nearly two decades and has the federal grant track record, including a \$4.6M USDA GusNIP award, to match state dollars dollar-for-dollar. Bonus Bucks expands access to fresh, culturally relevant produce for the nearly 40% of Rhode Island households currently struggling to afford enough food. It stabilizes income for the small farms and producers who have been squeezed by rising land, labor, and input costs.

A \$200,000 state appropriation is also a hedge against the federal cuts to SNAP currently advancing through H.R.1. These cuts eliminate SNAP benefits for thousands of Rhode Island households and revenue for the local food businesses they patronize. State-level investment in Bonus Bucks is one of the few tools that can absorb part of that shock and keep dollars circulating with Rhode Island farms.

I urge the Committee to pass H7258 and fund the program at the full appropriation. I am happy to be a resource to the Committee on this bill or any related nutrition or food policy matter.

Sincerely,

Jason Kashdan, MS, RD