

May 14, 2026

The Honorable Marvin Abney House Committee on Finance

Rhode Island General Assembly

82 Smith Street Providence, RI 02903

SUBJECT: Support for House Resolution 7258

Dear Chair Abney and Members of the Committee: I, Kate Balestracci, would like to voice support for House Resolution 7258, RESOLUTION MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$200,000 TO BE USED FOR INCENTIVES FOR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES SOLD AT PARTICIPATING BONUS BUCKS OUTLETS IN RHODE ISLAND, by Rep. Donovan, and we thank the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony.

I am a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist who has worked in public health for the last 18 years working to improve food security in Rhode Island. Bonus Bucks has been instrumental to increasing access to affordable, fresh and local produce.

House Resolution 7258 authorizes the appropriation of \$200,000 for the Farm Fresh Bonus Bucks Program. Bonus Bucks expand on USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by matching funds for the purchase of nutritious, locally grown, fresh fruits and vegetables. Bonus Bucks are offered at local farmers markets, farm stands, and delivery programs across Rhode Island. This vital program makes fresh healthy foods accessible and affordable for low-income families by doubling the value of SNAP dollars to spend on locally sourced produce.

The majority of SNAP benefits go to households with children, older adults, or those with disabilities. The Farm Fresh Bonus Bucks Program addresses a critical need as families in our state struggle to put healthy food on the table. SNAP nutrition incentives reduce food insecurity and promote healthy communities. Funding Bonus Bucks has a dual impact on addressing food insecurity and farm viability. SNAP incentive programs like Bonus Bucks help families buy healthier options. In a time when food costs and other costs of living continue to rise, having a means to make healthy food affordable to those who may not be able to afford such foods, is imperative to positive nutrition behavior change and reducing the risk of chronic disease.

Please support House Resolution 7258 and include \$200,000 in the FY27 Budget for the Farm Fresh Bonus Bucks Program to ensure access to fresh fruits and vegetables for Rhode Islanders struggling to feed themselves and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kate Balestracci, PhD, RDN