

Mary Kay Crepinsek, MS

129 Chickadee Lane
South Kingstown, RI 02879
781-724-7488

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Re: Support for H8171 - Food As Medicine Pilot Program Act

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

I am writing today to express my support for House Bill 8171, for which you held a hearing last Thursday. This important bill would establish a Food as Medicine Task Force to develop a Medicaid pilot that will improve health outcomes and advance health equity in Rhode Island through access to nutritious food. It builds on existing programs in Rhode Island and ensures future investments are data-driven and fiscally responsible.

As a former Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Senior Researcher with Mathematica Policy Research, I led evaluations of federal and local food and nutrition assistance programs and learned of the success of Food is Medicine programs in states like Massachusetts and New York. As a result, prior to retiring, I became a regular donor to the fast-growing Community Servings non-profit in Massachusetts (<https://www.servings.org/>). Their meals are made from scratch and medically tailored, meeting the medical and nutritional needs of clients with HIV/AIDS, cancer, kidney disease, diabetes, and other life-threatening illnesses.

In addition to providing meals for seriously and chronically ill individuals, Food Is Medicine initiatives can also include fresh produce prescriptions, medically tailored groceries, and nutrition education. As an alum of the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, I would encourage committee members to visit their Food is Medicine Institute website (<https://tuftsfoodismedicine.org/>) for more insight into the current and future possibilities for this initiative in our state.

For many Rhode Islanders living with chronic illness, food is not just a personal choice, it is a major factor in health, recovery, and quality of life. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. I respectfully urge the committee to support and pass H8171 to establish a Food as Medicine Pilot Program.

Sincerely,

Mary Kay Crepinsek