



September 12, 2023

Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
24 Beacon St
Room 507 & 146
Boston, MA 02133

RE: H185 An Act relative to the healthy incentives program

Dear Chairs Kennedy and Livingstone and members of the Committee,

The Massachusetts Food System Collaborative writes in support of H.185, which will direct the Department of Transitional Assistance and Department of Agricultural Resources to conduct a survey on the impacts of the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP).

HIP has operated for more than six years, but no research has examined its strengths and challenges since its first year. We know, broadly, that the program has been a success, providing more than \$52 million in fresh, healthy, local food to some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable households, with every dollar also helping to sustain local farms. Conducting this survey will allow the Commonwealth to build on known program gaps, revealed in the 2022 Notice of Opportunity which added more than 100 farmers to the program. Conducting this survey would ensure that the program's investments have significant long-term impact, by helping determine how and if the gaps are being closed, who is using the program and who is still not served well by HIP, and how it can better serve SNAP recipients and farmers in the future. The survey could also be used as a baseline to assess the long-term health impacts of HIP, a critical area for further study.

The information gathered by this study will help the agencies know how to best make strategic investments in the program so it continues to be a win for local economies, local agriculture, and public health. Its findings will be crucial in helping the program reach consumers and farmers who have still not been able to benefit from its success.

The Collaborative is a network of Massachusetts food system organizations, working to promote, monitor, and facilitate implementation of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan. The Plan was developed for and accepted by the Massachusetts Food Policy Council, a 17-member entity comprising state agency, legislative, and industry representatives, established by the Legislature



and Governor to develop recommendations, including legislative and regulatory changes, to promote sustainability, equity, and resilience in the Commonwealth's food system. The success of the HIP program was a key recommendation in the Plan, and has been a primary goal of the Collaborative for the last six years.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Miller
Massachusetts Food System Collaborative
Boston, MA