TO: Representative Raymond E. Gallison Jr., Chair  
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Kathleen S. Gorman, Ph.D. 

RE: H 7567- Joint Resolution Making an Appropriation of $100,000 to the  
Department of Human Services

DATE: Wednesday, April 30, 2014

H7567 - appropriates one hundred thousand dollars ($100,000) to the Department of Human Services for the fiscal year 2015 to support activities outlined within the State of Rhode Island SNAP Outreach Plan approved by the USDA.

Given many of the barriers to participation in SNAP, the federal government encourages states to devise and implement outreach strategies to assist potentially eligible clients to access program benefits. The State of Rhode Island successfully submitted its first Outreach Proposal in 2001, which was funded entirely through third party match. The federal government (Food and Nutrition Service/USDA) contributes an equal amount to the existing third party match for states to enhance their outreach activities.

For the first several years of having a state outreach plan, the Food Stamp Outreach Project primarily addressed the barriers to SNAP participation by providing training to social service agencies and disseminating informational materials. Based on feedback from our community partners, as well as many legislators who were hearing about the needs from their constituents, we began to consider the possibility of providing more direct 1-on-1 assistance to individual clients. In 2006 the RI general assembly invested $100,000 of state funds to support SNAP Outreach and our direct client assistance was launched throughout the state. Since then, the RI legislature has been a strong supporter of SNAP (formerly Food Stamp) Outreach. With an annual investment of just $100,000/yr, which is matched by another $100,000 from the federal government, the state of RI SNAP Outreach Plan has been strengthened allowing us to provide assistance to literally thousands of potentially eligible clients in every corner of the state (see handouts).

Parallel with this investment, participation in SNAP has increased by over 100% (from 75,000 individuals in 2006) to 180,000 in March 2014. In FY 2013 alone, $302,979,333 federal dollars in SNAP benefits were allocated to RI households, the majority of which was spent in Rhode Island retail outlets. As compared to 2006 ($77,000,000), this represents an increase of 174% of money going directly into local Rhode Island businesses. With an estimated economic multiplier effect of 1.84, in 2013, SNAP benefits generated more than $557,000,000 in

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economic activity, resulting in a significant contribution to the economic vitality of our state’s local economy.

A continued investment of $100,000 in DHS money dedicated to Outreach will assure that access and retention in the program are maintained. We provide a valuable service to hundreds of community partners throughout the state, providing staff training, information dissemination, and direct application assistance in addition to staffing a hotline that receives hundreds of calls each month. Additionally, the outreach project fills a vital void at the Department of Human Services. As caseloads remain high and staffing shortages not likely to be remedied any time soon, the need for outreach efforts to assist clients continues to be critical. The assistance we provide to clients, helps to ensure that the applications that arrive at DHS are complete, that the documentation is accurate and available, and that clients are prepared for their interview. This in turn allows the DHS caseworkers to do their job with a high degree of integrity and efficiency.

The $100,000 in state money allows for an additional $100,000 in federal funds and contributes millions of dollars to the economic activity in our state. While the economy is slowly recovering, unemployment continues to remain high, and thousands of individuals and families continue to struggle to make ends meet. The SNAP Outreach Project provides a vital service to the residents and to the state and we urge your continued investment in these efforts.

Thank you for your consideration.

cc: House Finance Committee Members
Application Assistance Provided in the Community to 1,240 Households
Total number of people assisted, statewide, through our toll-free hotline: 

2,642

Total number of people assisted, statewide, in the community: 

3,852

Tens of thousands more reached through media messaging, promotional materials, direct mail, and community trainings.