



**Texas House Human Services Committee**  
**House Bill 2983 by Representative Tom Oliverson**  
**Written Testimony on Behalf of:**  
**Texas Pediatric Society and Partnership for a Healthy Texas**  
**March 28, 2023**

Chair Frank, Vice Chair Rose, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Texas Pediatric Society and the Partnership for a Healthy Texas, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2983. We strongly support HB 2983 and Rep. Oliverson's efforts to create programs that help Medicaid patients access healthy and nutritious foods.

Food insecurity is a major issue in our state. Over 15 percent of households report experiencing difficulty accessing sufficient food and over 20 percent of households with children. Food insecurity is also a key driver of health, and as a result, driver of health care costs. The Center for Disease Control suggests that food insecurity adds about \$2 billion annually to health care costs in Texas.<sup>1</sup>

How do food and food insecurity impact health? Take a child whose family lacks access to a convenient and affordable grocery store or food pantry, whose family relies instead on fast food or highly processed foods. Children with unhealthy diets are not only at greater risk of malnutrition, harming their cognitive and physical growth over time, but also of developing obesity, diabetes and other chronic health conditions. Likewise, adults with chronic disease, such as diabetes or heart disease, who lack ready access to healthy foods, have higher rates of medical complications. Similarly, if a child has already been diagnosed with a chronic disease, such as kidney failure, cystic fibrosis, or even something as common as asthma or eczema, lack of access to healthy, affordable foods can significantly worsen their disease state and make traditional medical interventions less effective. A physician can prescribe medications to control the illness and educate their patients on the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. However, if they reside in a "food desert" – a community without easy access to healthy foods – then no amount of education or medication can overcome this factor.

Pediatricians are highly aware of these connections. We see the results in our offices every day. This connection between food and health is so significant that the AAP recommends screening for food insecurity at every well child visit, deeming it the "Hunger Vital Sign."

**Healthy food is good medicine.** In Texas, existing food as medicine programs have shown success in reducing food insecurity and improving health outcomes. Collaborations between clinical and community services to improve access to healthy foods have resulted in significant decreases in obesity, diabetes severity, and high blood pressure.<sup>2</sup> Benefits extend beyond alleviating the acute food and health needs by helping families build skills that last a lifetime. Participants in food as medicine programs have shown increased consumption of fruit and vegetables by school aged children even after the intervention ends.<sup>3</sup> These long-term outcomes reduce chronic disease, keeping Texans healthy, and health care costs low.

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<sup>1</sup> Berkowitz SA, Basu S, Gundersen C, Seligman HK. State-Level and County-Level Estimates of Health Care Costs Associated with Food Insecurity. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2019;16:180549. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.180549>

<sup>2</sup> UT Health Houston Webinar "Food Prescription Programs: The Houston Food Bank Experience and Outcomes" <https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/dell/webinars/rockefeller%20foodrxwebinar%20final%20slides.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Shreela V. Sharma, Christine Markham, Joanne Chow, Nalini Ranjit, Michael Pomeroy, Margaret Raber, Evaluating a school-based fruit and vegetable co-op in low-income children: A quasi-experimental study, *Preventive Medicine*, Volume 91, 2016, Pages 8-17, ISSN 0091-7435, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2016.07.022>.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2893. For any questions or follow-up please contact Clayton Travis, Director of Advocacy and Health Policy with the Texas Pediatric Society at [Clayton.Travis@txpeds.org](mailto:Clayton.Travis@txpeds.org).