



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

February 8, 2005

The Honorable Marilyn Rasmussen
Washington State Senate
Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Committee Chair
409 Legislative Building
PO Box 40402
Olympia, Washington 98504-0402

Dear Senator Rasmussen:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to support the concept of Senate Bill 5597, which is scheduled to be heard before your committee today. The bill would further expand and maintain the Farmers Market Nutrition Program for clients of the Women Infant and Children (WIC) program and low income seniors.

The Board believes public policy should encourage greater levels of physical activity and improve opportunities for healthy nutrition. In response to the growing childhood obesity epidemic in our state, the Board made children's activity and nutrition one of its top priorities. It convened a number of organizations, including the Washington State School Directors' Association, the Washington State Department of Health, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the University of Washington Center for Public Health Nutrition, the Washington State Parent Teacher Association, the Washington School Food Service Association, and local health jurisdictions, to organize a series of community meetings. These meetings have provided an opportunity for communities to discuss the far-reaching consequences of children's inactivity and poor nutrition and share ways schools can help address this serious problem.

It serves our state well to make fruits and vegetables more accessible to some of our more vulnerable residents, since we know that there is a link between consumption of these foods and a decreased risk of cancer, heart disease, and obesity. Unfortunately, more than half of Washington residents are already obese or overweight, and our state has some of the highest levels of hunger and food insecurity in the nation.

The Board recognizes that the state faces a serious budget shortfall and that the Legislature will have to make many very difficult decisions about funding this session. An appropriation for this bill was not included in Governor Locke's budget proposal.

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We know, however, that in the long run it is usually much more cost-effective to prevent a condition than to treat it. The goals of the Farmers Market Nutrition Program are consistent with those that the Board has endorsed on behalf of Washington State residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Locke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'T'.

Thomas Locke, MD, MPH
Chair, Washington State Board of Health

cc: Senate Agricultural & Rural Economic Development Committee Members
The Honorable Kelli Linville
Ms. Ree Sailors, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Chris Townley, Department of Health
Washington State Board of Health Members
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, State Board of Health