



Alsip
Beecher
Blue Island
Burnham
Calumet City
Calumet Park
Chicago Heights
Country Club Hills
Crestwood
Crete
Dixmoor
Dolton
East Hazel Crest
Flossmoor
Ford Heights
Glenwood
Harvey
Hazel Crest
Homewood
Lansing
Lynwood
Markham
Matteson
Midlothian
Mokena
Monee
Oak Forest
Olympia Fields
Orland Hills
Orland Park
Park Forest
Peotone
Phoenix
Posen
Richton Park
Riverdale
Robbins
Sauk Village
South Chicago Heights
South Holland
Steger
Thornton
Tinley Park
University Park
Worth

**Testimony to the Cook County Business & Economic Development Committee,
October 19, 2022**

Chairman Gainer, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kristi DeLaurentiis, executive director of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, representing 39 communities and over 700,000 residents within southern Cook County. I'm here today to express our strong support for the Food Desert Property Tax Incentive Ordinance Amendment (File #22-5345) which creates a new property tax incentive class that encourages the location of new grocery stores, and assists in retaining existing grocery stores, in identified food deserts to expand healthy food access and improve economic opportunities for underserved communities.

As many of you know, the south suburbs has struggled with economic stagnation and high property rates for decades. Unfortunately, this has resulted in widespread food deserts in our region which impact our residents' access to healthy foods. This lack of access to healthy food choices contributes to disparities in health outcomes and life expectancy. Data from the Illinois Suburban Cook County Community Health Assessment demonstrated that south suburban Cook County has the least access to full-service chain supermarkets per person, and a high density of corner stores with few to no healthy food options. In addition, residents within south suburban communities have some of the highest—which translates to worst— Social Vulnerability Index figures within the County.

You may know that Social Vulnerability refers to the resilience of communities, the ability to survive and thrive, and incorporates both health and economic conditions, and lack of access to both healthy food and affordable and reliable transportation options.

The Southland region's high Social Vulnerability scores reflect how we've been disproportionately affected by disinvestment, redlining, and lack of access to affordable and reliable transportation options and full service grocers. The County's proposed Food Desert Property Tax Incentive will not only help create greater access to healthy foods and put full service grocery stores within reach of more families, but it will serve as an economic development catalyst that creates and retains good jobs.

Our Association supports the forward thinking policy within the proposed ordinance that allows existing grocers that are on the ground and in or near a food desert to be eligible

for the 7D Food Desert incentive. This is known to be an effective tool for reinvestment and strategy for sustainable development and encourages investment in current stores, renovation, and expansion of facilities. Likewise, including the eligibility requirement for both new and existing grocers to have at least 55% of its employee workforce be employed on a full time basis results in employees who earn wages and benefits which can support a family. This translates to not only the grocer benefitting from the Food Desert Property Tax Incentive but actual employees, as well. The net result is the food desert ordinance has far reaching healthcare and economic outcomes on the community as a whole.

In conclusion, the County's own objectives to advance safe, healthy and thriving communities throughout Cook County calls for passage of Ordinance Number 22-5345. By supporting the 7D Amendment before you today, you provide a new powerful equity-centered tool that increases access to healthy food; increases healthy food consumption; increases food security; reduces obesity rates; improves health outcomes; AND improves the local economy through the creation/retention of jobs, the generation of local sales taxes and property taxes, and investments which cycle local dollars back into the local community. This is innovative, transformational policy.

On behalf of the South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association and the over 700,000 residents we represent, I urge you to pass the Food Desert Property Tax Incentive Ordinance today. Thank you.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kristi DeLaurentiis".

Kristi DeLaurentiis
Executive Director
South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association