



October 18, 2010

Testimony Of:  
Tanikka Cunningham  
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Bill 18-967, the "Food, Environmental, and Economic Development  
in the District of Columbia Act of 2010" FEED ACT

Committee on Government Operations and the Environment and Economic Development

Monday, October 18, 2010  
Location: John A. Wilson Building, Room 500

Chairman Cheh, and members of the committee, Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tanikka Cunningham, and I am the Executive Director of Healthy Solutions.

Healthy Solutions is a community based non-profit 501(c) (3) organization working to enhance the lives of the underserved, underprivileged, and/or marginalized and to help them make informed decisions. Our vision is to create equitable communities by creating sustainable community-based food systems allowing all community members 1) access to healthy affordable foods, 2) quality jobs through agriculture, and 3) education and training. Since 2004 Healthy Solutions has worked to insure equitable communities that help eliminate the health and social disparities faced daily in African American rural and urban communities; while creating environmental change to better the community as a whole, through equal access to healthy and affordable foods. Our main programs include DC Produce Co-op, Red Truck Farm, and Co-op Markets that on average brings in 10,000lbs a month of organic produce East of the River. Healthy Solutions also had the privilege of supplying 7 corner stores in Ward 7 during the Healthy Corner Store Initiative through DC Hunger Solutions.

I first would like to applaud the council for making Healthy Food Accessibility a priority, as Healthy Solutions believes that access to healthy foods is one of the most basic of human needs. Healthy Solutions supports the passing of this act. This act could bring about the options that I believe that my community members deserve. For that I am very glad.

I read through the proposed bill, and I would like to emphasize that is a great step in the right direction. However, Healthy Solutions would like to bring up some items that we feel need clarification in this act, or we would like to see in it, that would benefit our community members in this act.

- 1) Healthy Foods in not clearly defined in this Act, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables are mentioned, but there is no clear definition of what this bill proposes that Healthy Foods includes.

- 2) Under Title II (Grocery Store Financing Program) Section 201 (b)(2), it is our belief that a organization that would be responsible for bringing in more groceries and promoting it, should have much more expertise in retail, working around food and in food access. More expertise is needed than just researching the existence of food desserts.
- 3) In Title II Section 201 (C) Healthy Solutions would like to suggest the use of Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA) areas instead of Enterprise Zones, or other forms of census track.
- 4) Title II Section 202 (a) (2), Healthy Solutions would like a grocery store not only to have to apply to accept WIC, but to make sure that they can obtain WIC. We believe that the language allows for loop holes and those loop holes will allow grocery stores not to accept benefits that many of our community members rely on for their households.
- 5) Title II Section 202 (a) (4), Healthy Solutions would like to see that grocery stores only sell produce, and remove the part of the bill that states develop a plan to do so. We believe that if a grocery store does not have or will not be selling produce it should not be able to apply for any incentives because it is not giving fresh produce options to our community members, thus not making healthier foods available.
- 6) In Title III (Healthy Corner Store Program) Section 302 (a), it is our belief that corner stores who enroll in this program have to Accept SNAP, and WIC, the language in the bill at current says it strongly encourages. We believe that if any business is going to get any "incentives" to make money then they have to accept these benefit, not be encouraged to do so.
- 7) Healthy Solutions is an organization that believes that in order for anything to have an impact on the community the community has to have a stake in it. We believe that this Bill allows for job creation, however does not speak of economic incentives or opportunities for community members to start, expand or build corner stores, grocery stores, and markets. Opportunities that would create opportunity for community members not only to have access to fresh foods, but would also give them opportunity to own businesses, and become economically viable in the communities in which they live. This would not only be for brick and mortar establishments but for mobile fresh food trucks, co-ops, and farmers/co-op markets. We believe that these stores should not be just located in our communities, but should be run and operated by our community members. When jobs are created we want our community members not just to work, but to thrive.
- 8) Title III, Section 303, Healthy Food Distribution, proposes a working group, which would develop a plan to distribute fresh produce to corner stores. It speaks of developing a group that would issue a report by December 2011. I believe that a distribution system cannot wait that long. I speak from experience as being the only African American woman who has ever owned a produce distribution company, and one who on a daily basis sold over 100,000lbs of produce to the military, schools, prisons, and retailers. A produce distribution system is not the easiest thing to operate, however with the proper resources, many- including Healthy Solutions - could have it done in a matter of weeks from now. I believe that time table for recommendations alone, leaves our community members waiting another year for their stores to have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. That time tables leaves many parents with the same issues they have now, how to feed their families fresh foods when there are no options in their local stores.
- 9) Healthy Solutions would like to suggest that, this council looks at creating creative funding packages for stores that do not include mainly grants. We believe that these stores regardless how small, still are business, and we would like these store owners to be required to "put their money



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where their mouth is”, and have to put something forth to be able to receive all of these incentives that at the end of the day, make them more money. Options could include low percentage loans, or a small grant for a down payment of a loan, but not just give money in the hands of business owners when grant dollars could go towards education and outreach to community members.

- 10) Finally, Healthy Solutions would like to see a way that would makes sure that stores, and groceries stores make foods affordable to our community members. Often times we emphasize the need for SNAP, and WIC, and other supplemental services, but we overlook the fact that residents who do not receive subsidized food allotment find that the price of healthy foods are out of their budgets. Even when one does receive subsidized food allotments they too, would like to buy healthier foods and make their dollars stretch. If we have a grocery store on every corner and no one can afford the food, have we accomplished anything? No.

The Act as it stands puts changes in place that we have been speaking of for years. If this council would only take one of the suggestion or clarifications, I have presented today. I would stress the need for our community members having to have access to creating economic stability in their communities, by having access to the incentives offered, through this Act. I would stress the need for communities to have a stake at changing their eating habits by having a control of the food that comes in their communities. I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to testify in front of you all today, and I am open for any questions or comments you may have for me.

Submitted By:

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