

Good afternoon, Chairman Johnson and members of the House Agriculture Committee. My name is Colleen Pearce and I am the WIC Program Director for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here to provide testimony supporting Senate Concurrent Resolution 4013.

The simple fact is that without retailers to sell food to our families, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) would not be able to achieve its public health mission.

WIC is a targeted, time-limited supplemental public health nutrition program that serves over 11,000 women, infants and young children each month, across North Dakota (ND). You might be surprised to learn that over half of all ND infants participant in WIC.

The mission of WIC is to ensure healthy pregnancies, healthy birth outcomes and healthy growth and development for women, infants and children up to age five who are at nutritional risk. WIC accomplishes this through breastfeeding promotion and support; education on healthy eating; and referrals to healthcare and critical social services. For over 40 years, WIC's services and benefits have helped ensure many ND children get a strong, healthy start in life. There is clear evidence that good nutrition during pregnancy and in the first few years of life has long-term positive impacts on health. There is also evidence on the negative long-term consequences of inadequate nutrition and hunger, such as increased susceptibility to diet-sensitive chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

WIC serves our participants through the 70 nutritionists and health professionals working at WIC clinics located in 22 local public health agencies, hospitals and tribal programs across the state. The Department of Health and our partners are proud that WIC is helping so many ND families who struggle to put food on the table. For many who live in rural areas, there can be challenges to find healthy, affordable food – such as having to drive long distances to a grocery store.

North Dakota WIC partners with about 160 full-service grocery stores in the state who provide WIC approved food. These retailers not only offer quality services to our WIC families, they are a critical component to build healthy and vibrant communities. That is why the Department of Health supports a study on how we can ensure that healthy, affordable food is distributed and transported to rural areas of the state.

This concludes my presentation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.