

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2015

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HOUSE BILL 250*
Committee Substitute Favorable 6/15/15

Short Title: Healthy Food Small Retailer/Corner Store Act.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 17, 2015

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO ENACT THE CORNER STORE INITIATIVE ACT TO ASSIST HEALTHY
3 FOOD SMALL RETAILERS.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 **SECTION 1.** Chapter 106 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new
6 Article to read:

7 "Article 62B.

8 "Healthy Food Small Retailer Act.

9 **"§ 106-755.5. Healthy Food Small Retailer Fund.**

10 (a) Findings. – The General Assembly finds the following:

11 (1) Overweight children and adults are at greater risk for numerous adverse
12 health consequences, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high
13 blood pressure, high cholesterol, certain cancers, asthma, low self-esteem,
14 depression, and other debilitating diseases. In North Carolina, over sixty-five
15 percent (65%) of adult residents were considered overweight or obese and
16 over thirty-one percent (31%) of children were considered overweight or
17 obese. Obese children are at least twice as likely as non-obese children to
18 become obese adults.

19 (2) The medical costs of obesity are rising rapidly in the United States and are
20 estimated to be one hundred forty-seven billion dollars (\$147,000,000,000)
21 per year. Roughly half of these obesity-related costs are paid by Medicare
22 and Medicaid, indicating taxpayers bear the majority of the cost for
23 obesity-related medical care. Obesity-related health care spending accounts
24 for eight and one-half percent (8.5%) of Medicare spending, eleven and
25 eight-tenths percent (11.8%) of Medicaid spending, and twelve and
26 nine-tenths percent (12.9%) of private payer spending.

27 (3) Many Americans, particularly those in low-income neighborhoods, rural
28 areas, and communities of color, live in communities that lack adequate
29 access to full-service grocery stores. Low-income areas have more than
30 twice as many convenience stores and four times as many small grocery
31 stores as high-income areas. Proximity to convenience stores within a
32 neighborhood is associated with higher rates of obesity and diabetes.

33 (4) Research indicates that small food stores sell little fresh produce, whole
34 grains, and low-fat dairy products but sell larger quantities of foods that are
35 high in fat and low in nutrients. Small food stores regularly charge higher
36 prices for food as compared to grocery stores and supermarkets.



1 (5) Providing assistance to existing small food retailers to stock fresh produce
2 and other healthy foods and promote good nutrition can provide residents
3 with access to healthier foods. Community programs that work with these
4 small food retailers have shown promise in increasing healthy food sales,
5 improving store offerings, and promoting good nutrition.

6 (6) Efforts are currently underway among the Department of Commerce, the
7 Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Health and Human
8 Services to utilize existing retail outlet infrastructure to facilitate access to
9 and increase consumption of nutrient-dense foods in order to improve
10 overall health and reduce public medical care costs.

11 (b) Purpose. – The program established pursuant to this section is intended to provide a
12 source of funding and assistance for small food retailers operating in the State, in both urban
13 and rural areas, with the goal of increasing availability and sales of fresh fruits, vegetables, and
14 other nutrient-dense foods at affordable prices to local residents and improving the diet and
15 health of local residents, especially in food desert zones.

16 (c) Fund. – The Healthy Food Small Retailer Fund is created as a restricted reserve in
17 the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Funds in the Fund do not revert but
18 remain available to the Department for food desert relief purposes.

19 (d) Definitions. – The following definitions apply in this section:

20 (1) Business. – A corporation, sole proprietorship, cooperative association,
21 partnership, S corporation, limited liability company, nonprofit corporation,
22 or other form of business organization, located either within or outside this
23 State.

24 (2) Department. – The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

25 (3) Food desert relief. – Moneys allocated to a county or regional public health
26 department to provide funds, equipment, or other assistance to a small food
27 retailer located in a food desert zone to enable the small food retailer to carry
28 and sell nutrient-dense foods.

29 (4) Food desert zone. – A census tract that has been identified by the Economic
30 Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture as meeting
31 each of the following criteria:

32 a. The tract has a poverty rate of twenty percent (20%) or greater or has
33 a median family income at or below eighty percent (80%) of the
34 median family income for the State.

35 b. The tract has at least 500 persons or at least thirty-three percent
36 (33%) of the population who, for a metropolitan area, live more than
37 one mile from a grocery store or healthy, affordable food retail outlet
38 store or, for a nonmetropolitan area, more than 10 miles from a
39 grocery store or healthy, affordable food retail outlet store.

40 (5) Nutrient dense food. – A food that has high levels of nutrients in relationship
41 to the number of calories the food contains. The term includes fresh
42 vegetables and fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes, low-fat
43 dairy products, lean meats, and seafood.

44 (6) Small food retailer. – A business that is a small retail outlet, including corner
45 stores, convenience stores, cooperatives, and bodegas, of no more than 5,000
46 heated square feet that sells a limited selection of foods and other products.

47 (e) Designation. – Upon application of a county, the Commissioner of Agriculture shall
48 make a written determination whether an area is a food desert zone, as defined in this section.
49 A determination under this section is effective until December 31 of the year 10 years
50 following the year in which the determination is made. The Department shall publish annually

1 a list of all food desert zones with a description of their boundaries. The application required by
2 this subsection shall include all of the following:

- 3 (1) A map showing the census tracts and block groups that would comprise the
4 zone.
- 5 (2) A detailed description of the boundaries of the area that would comprise the
6 zone.
- 7 (3) Detailed census information on the county and the proposed zone.
- 8 (4) A resolution of the board of county commissioners requesting the
9 designation of the area as a food desert zone.
- 10 (5) Any other material required by the Commissioner of Agriculture.

11 (f) Administration. – The Department shall develop guidelines providing for the
12 administration of the program and selection of recipients of food desert relief. The Department
13 may use up to five percent (5%) of funds appropriated to the Fund to administer the Fund. The
14 guidelines developed shall include the following provisions, which shall apply to food desert
15 relief awards from the Fund:

- 16 (1) The funds shall be used only for the following:
 - 17 a. Amounts to a county or regional public health department to
18 purchase and install at a small food retailer refrigeration equipment,
19 display shelving, and other equipment necessary for stocking
20 nutrient-dense foods. Total funding under this sub-subdivision may
21 not exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000) per small food retailer.
 - 22 b. Amounts to a county or regional public health department to be given
23 to a small food retailer to offset initial expenses related to
24 participating in food desert relief efforts. Total funding under this
25 sub-subdivision may not exceed one hundred dollars (\$100.00) per
26 small food retailer.
 - 27 c. Amounts to a county or regional public health department to cover
28 salaries and associated costs of either employees or contractors
29 providing technical assistance to small food retailers on
30 nutrient-dense food safety and handling, nutrition education, and
31 business operations and promotion related to nutrient-dense food
32 inventory. Total funding under this sub-subdivision may not exceed
33 one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500) per small food retailer.
- 34 (2) In determining disbursements of moneys from the Fund, the Department
35 shall consider the level of need in the area to be served.
- 36 (3) The Department shall establish monitoring and accountability mechanisms
37 for recipients.
- 38 (4) Funds may be used only for assistance of small food retailers in food desert
39 zones.
- 40 (5) Small food retailers receiving moneys from the Fund must accept or agree to
41 accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and must accept
42 or agree to apply to accept Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for
43 Women, Infants and Children benefits.
- 44 (6) Recipients must provide defined objectives, standards, and accountability
45 mechanisms to ensure that expenditure of moneys from the Fund are
46 consistent with this section, including (i) submitting a plan describing
47 specific goals for increasing the sales of nutrient-dense foods by small food
48 retailers, engaging the community to support participating small food
49 retailers, and establishing standards to assess whether goals are being met
50 and (ii) recruiting county, municipal, and other agencies to provide
51 expertise, support, and coordination of efforts to support small food retailers.

1 (g) Agreements. – Funds may be disbursed from the Healthy Food Small Retailer Fund
2 only in accordance with agreements entered into between the State and one or more county or
3 regional public health departments and between the county or regional public health department
4 and a small food retailer.

5 (h) Retailer Performance Agreements. – An agreement between a county or regional
6 public health department and a small retailer must contain the following provisions:

7 (1) A commitment to promote and sell nutrient-dense foods at a specific
8 location and the minimum time period for which the promotion and sales
9 must be maintained.

10 (2) A commitment to provide proof satisfactory to the county or regional public
11 health department and the State of nutrient-dense food promotion and sales.

12 (3) A provision that funds received under the agreement may be used only for a
13 purpose specified in this section.

14 (4) A provision allowing the State or the county or regional public health
15 department to inspect all records of the small food retailer that may be used
16 to confirm compliance with the agreement or with the requirements of this
17 section.

18 (5) A provision establishing the method for determining compliance with the
19 agreement.

20 (6) A provision establishing a schedule for disbursement of funds for purchasing
21 and installing equipment under the agreement that allows disbursement of
22 funds only after a small food retailer has submitted a plan of implementation
23 for the stocking, promotion, and sale of nutrient-dense foods.

24 (7) A provision requiring recapture of equipment provided to a small food
25 retailer if the small food retailer subsequently fails to comply with the terms
26 of the agreement for a period of not less than five years following receipt of
27 the equipment.

28 (8) A provision allowing a small food retailer receiving equipment pursuant to
29 this section to purchase the equipment for a nominal amount five years
30 following receipt of the equipment.

31 (9) A provision encouraging the small food retailer to contract with local
32 producers of available nutrient-dense foods.

33 (10) Any other provision the State or the county or regional public health
34 department finds necessary to ensure the proper use of State or local funds.

35 (i) Local Food Desert Relief Agreement. – An agreement between the State and one or
36 more county or regional public health departments shall contain the following provisions:

37 (1) A provision requiring the county or regional public health department to
38 recapture any funds to which the county or regional public health department
39 is entitled under the retailer performance agreement.

40 (2) A provision requiring the county or regional public health department to
41 reimburse the State for any funds improperly disbursed or funds recaptured
42 by the county or regional public health department.

43 (3) A provision allowing the State access to all records possessed by county or
44 regional public health department necessary to ensure compliance with the
45 retailer performance agreement and with the requirements of this section.

46 (4) A provision establishing a schedule for the disbursement of funds from the
47 Healthy Food Small Retailer Fund to the county or regional public health
48 department that reflects the disbursement schedule established in the retailer
49 performance agreement.

50 (5) Any other provision the State finds necessary to ensure the proper use of
51 State funds.

1 (j) Disbursement of Funds. – Funds may be disbursed from the Healthy Food Small
2 Retailer Fund to the county or regional public health department only after the county or
3 regional public health department has demonstrated that the retailer has complied with the
4 terms of the retailer performance agreement. The State shall disburse funds allocated under the
5 Healthy Food Small Retailer Fund to a county or regional public health department in
6 accordance with the disbursement schedule established in the local food desert relief
7 agreement.

8 (k) Reports. – The Department shall publish a report on the use of funds in the Healthy
9 Food Small Retailer Fund on or before April 30 of each year. The Department shall submit the
10 report electronically to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human
11 Services, the House and Senate appropriations committee with jurisdiction over agriculture and
12 natural and economic resources, and the Fiscal Research Division. The report shall include the
13 amount of funds disbursed, the geographic distribution of disbursements, and an evaluation of
14 the outcome of the disbursements, including the health impact associated with the funding.

15 (l) Guidelines. – The Department shall develop guidelines related to the administration
16 of the Healthy Food Small Retailer Fund and to the selection of projects to receive allocations
17 from the Fund. At least 20 days before the effective date of any guidelines or nontechnical
18 amendments to guidelines, the Department must publish the proposed guidelines on the
19 Department's Web site and provide notice to persons who have requested notice of proposed
20 guidelines. In addition, the Department must accept oral and written comments on the proposed
21 guidelines during the 15 business days beginning on the first day that the Department has
22 completed these notifications. For the purpose of this section, a technical amendment is either
23 of the following:

24 (1) An amendment that corrects a spelling or grammatical error.

25 (2) An amendment that makes a clarification based on public comment and
26 could have been anticipated by the public notice that immediately preceded
27 the public comment."

28 **SECTION 2.** This act is effective when it becomes law.