

**TO: The Honorable Sara Gelser, Chair
Human Services and Early Childhood Committee
and members of the committee**

From: Raegan Parker

Subject: Testimony for SB 700

The WIC program as helped out family through many tight years. Our family started receiving WIC benefits over six and a half years ago, shortly after our second child was born. We continued on the program until just after my fourth child was born and my husband received his law degree from Willamette University.

To give a little bit of my background, I am a stay at home mom with four children. Prior to the birth of our second son, my husband had a great job with the state. We had a steady income with excellent benefits. That all changed when my husband decided to go back to school. He quit his job and we started living off part-time income. Finances became stressful. We did not qualify for food stamps or other state assistance but without a full steady income, we began to struggle.

Around the time my husband started school, a friend who was already in the program introduced me to WIC. In looking back over some of our harder years, I now realize how expensive it is to eat healthy. WIC was able to fill the nutritional gap that was created by our lower income. It was comforting to know that whatever our situation our children would always have a healthy meal. It is hard to feed a family on a budget and still provide fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods. I am truly grateful for the service that has been provided to my family.

One aspect of the WIC program that I particularly enjoyed was the Farm Direct Nutrition Program vouchers. I appreciated, the locally grown produce, the large variety of choices, and the increase in the amount of fruits and veggies our family enjoyed. It was also a fun outing for the family to visit the farmers market on the weekend.

With a growing family, the regular fruits and veggies provided by the WIC program always went fast. It was always a treat each summer when the Farm Direct vouchers came out. My boys enjoyed talking with the farmers at the stands and tasting different produce that they had never tried before. They would often pick some different vegetable that we did not normally eat to bring home. This gave me the added challenge of learning how to cook something new. While not all the vegetables we brought home were much of a hit with the boys, it was a fun activity and it broadened my boys' horizons when I came to trying new foods. As any parent knows, getting kids to try new things can be a major challenge. We had a rule that if the boys picked the food from the market, they had to eat it, and they did.

One of the other great things about the farm direct program is that we could get fresh local produce outside the farmers market. Many local farmers have produce stands at their farms. We would often make a family outing of visiting the farms to buy our produce. My boys loved seeing how the farm worked, the tractors, and animals. I appreciated that the "pick your own" produce was less expensive so we could get more food for our family. Picking our own berries or fruit was also a good opportunity for the children to learn about "hard" work. In addition, the local farmers are so nice. Many of them would talk to the boys about farming and show them the machinery that is used to grow and pick their crops. I remember my second son was really interested in a tall upside down u-shaped machine with something that looked similar to two car wash brushes on each side. He walked straight up to the farmer to ask what he used that machine for. That day we learned about the berry-picking machine. I had no idea they had machines for that.

I was very impressed with many of the farms and have continued to bring my family there each season. We buy our produce from them even now that we no longer participate in the WIC program. Essentially, the WIC program introduced us to a healthier and more entertaining way of providing our family with wholesome foods all the while supporting the local farmers. I feel our family has learned a lot from participating in the WIC Farm Direct Nutrition Program . It has helped us establish healthy eating habits individually and as a family. I am more aware of the local farmers markets and farm stands and do more shopping there than I ever would have had I not been on the program. We eat many more local fruits and vegetable now than ever before. I hope you will continue supporting WIC Farm Direct Nutrition Program. It has greatly benefited my family and I know it will benefit many more families. WIC Farm Direct Nutrition Program truly is an investment in a healthier community.