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December 19, 2017

To: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Consumer Protection

From: Brad Paul, Executive Director  
Jonathan Bader, Programs Director  
WISCAP

RE: Harvest for Hope (AB 577 & SB 487)

Thank you Madame Chairwoman and members of the Committee for inviting public comment on the Harvest for Hope legislation. We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback.

WISCAP is the statewide Association of Wisconsin's 16 anti-poverty Community Action Agencies and 2 special purpose agencies. Thirteen (13) of our members and 3 other partners coordinate the statewide distribution of federal TEFAP commodities to 334 food pantries, meal sites and shelters in every county. Food pantries in our network serve 200,000 people each month, while meal sites & shelters provide 45,000 meals in their communities each month. Community Action Agencies have been involved in emergency food in Wisconsin for many decades. In fact a few weeks ago WISCAP marked a significant milestone - the distribution of 200 million pounds of commodities since 1998.

WISCAP supports AB 577 - if the aforementioned amendments are adopted - because it will increase the supply of produce - both fresh and canned - recovered from farmers & food processors for distribution by all of Wisconsin's emergency food providers. This bill simply makes sense. Not only do low-income families receive healthy fruits & vegetables, but Wisconsin farmers & food processors receive payments for donating quality surplus foods. Other Midwestern states - notably Minnesota & Ohio - have long recovered their state's surplus agriculture products for donation to food pantries. In addition, the federal government itself regularly buys surplus food from U.S. farmers & processors for donation to schools & emergency food providers across the nation to aid farmers and to supplement the inventory of privately donated & purchased foods at food pantries. Wisconsin should not be left behind.

WISCAP also supports AB 577 because food insecurity in Wisconsin is real. Despite the robust economy many low-wage workers, children, seniors & disabled continue to struggle with insufficient income to buy the food they need. The number of household visits to TEFAP food pantries in 2017 is still 58% higher than before the recession. This tells us that tens of thousands of Wisconsinites remain under considerable nutritional & economic stress - including many thousands of young children.

WISCAP had concerns with the original bill as drafted that we shared with Feeding Wisconsin, who has been very responsive, and with the support of the bill's sponsors have proposed amendments that address key issues and strengthen the initiative. The amendments - which will soon be before the Committee for approval - expand participation & cooperation among providers and clarify the bill's original intent.

Specifically, the amendments:

- Clarify that HFH food will be provided to food pantries & other outlets at no charge.
- Clarify that HFH food will go to food pantries & other outlets located only in Wisconsin.
- Expands the types of food banks that distribute HFH foods to include organizations that coordinate regional distribution of federal commodities – called “Emergency Feeding Organizations” (EFOs).
- Further defines eligible food banks & EFOs as those that collect distribution data and monitor their networks for compliance with operational & food safety standards.
- Expands food pantries and other outlets eligible to receive HFH foods to members in good standing with any food bank or EFO – even independent food banks.
- Expands eligible grantees to include a statewide organization that supports the commodities network – in addition to a statewide Association of food banks.

WISCAP urges the Committee members to adopt the amendments and vote in favor of AB 577 to ensure the broadest participation in the distribution of HFH foods by Wisconsin’s networks of food banks, EFOs, food pantries and other eligible outlets. The amendments strengthen the initiative by promoting greater involvement & cooperation among organizations so HFH food are assured of reaching households in every community.

Thank you for your time & your consideration of our comments.

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*The Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP) is the statewide association of Wisconsin’s sixteen (16) anti-poverty Community Action Agencies and 2 statewide special purpose agencies. Our network addresses the problems of poverty across multiple sectors by helping low-income people attain greater economic self-sufficiency and by relieving situations of distress. Locally-controlled and operated Community Action Agencies strengthen Wisconsin families and communities by providing programs and services, including housing, energy, transportation, education, health, business development, family support, and food security.*

*Thirteen (13) Community Action Agencies and three partner agencies coordinate the distribution of 12 million pounds of federal commodities to 334 food pantries, meal sites and shelters statewide. Food pantries in the network collectively distribute over 50 million pounds of public and privately donated & purchased food annually.*