

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION No. 243

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 12, 2021

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman LINDA S. CARTER

District 22 (Middlesex, Somerset and Union)

Assemblyman STERLEY S. STANLEY

District 18 (Middlesex)

Assemblyman HERB CONAWAY, JR.

District 7 (Burlington)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman McKnight

SYNOPSIS

Urges federal government to modernize access to WIC.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 5/12/2021)

1 **AN ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION** urging the federal government to
2 modernize access to WIC.
3

4 **WHEREAS**, The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
5 began operating the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for
6 Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), a federal assistance program
7 for healthcare and nutrition of low-income pregnant women,
8 breastfeeding women, and children under the age of five, through
9 state agencies in 1974; and

10 **WHEREAS**, The WIC program is currently the largest federal nutrition
11 program after the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
12 (SNAP) and the National School Lunch Program; and

13 **WHEREAS**, New Jersey WIC is a preventive public health nutrition
14 program which utilizes various strategies to reduce the risk of poor
15 pregnancy outcomes and to facilitate the improvement of the
16 nutritional and health status of low-income pregnant, postpartum,
17 breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children; and

18 **WHEREAS**, To accomplish this goal, the program identifies and
19 provides services that prevent nutritional and health problems, such
20 as health screenings and nutritional counseling; and

21 **WHEREAS**, On average, the New Jersey WIC program serves over
22 130,000 total participants each year; and

23 **WHEREAS**, There is strong evidence that the program reduces the risk
24 of preterm birth, low birth weight, and infant mortality, particularly
25 for the African American community ; and

26 **WHEREAS**, Mothers qualify for WIC during pregnancy and for up to a
27 year after, and children qualify until age five, with eligibility based
28 on enrollment in other federal programs such as SNAP and
29 Medicaid or by income and nutritional risk criteria; and

30 **WHEREAS**, Despite the demonstrated nutritional and health benefits of
31 the program, participation has been steadily declining over the past
32 decade; and

33 **WHEREAS**, While there is no clear explanation for the decline,
34 advocates and WIC administrators point to several contributing
35 factors such as misconceptions about the program's eligibility and
36 the high-contact nature of enrollment and certification; and

37 **WHEREAS**, In order to provide state agencies the flexibility to continue
38 the WIC program during the COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA
39 issued waivers that allowed for social distancing in the WIC
40 program through remote certification and benefit issuance; and

41 **WHEREAS**, If these waivers were to continue post-pandemic and
42 access to the program was further modernized, there might be more
43 opportunities to offer more flexible ways to enroll and expand
44 access to eligible populations; and

45 **WHEREAS**, The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted extreme economic
46 hardship on many individuals in this State, who might now become
47 eligible for the WIC program, it is proper and fitting that this House

1 benefits of the program, participation has been steadily declining
2 over the past decade. While there is no clear explanation for the
3 decline, advocates and WIC administrators point to several
4 contributing factors such as misconceptions about the program's
5 eligibility and the high-contact nature of enrollment and
6 certification. In order to provide state agencies the flexibility to
7 continue the WIC program during the COVID-19 pandemic, the
8 USDA issued waivers that allowed for social distancing through
9 remote certification and benefit issuance. If these waivers were to
10 continue post-pandemic and access to the program was further
11 modernized, there might be more opportunities to offer more
12 flexible ways to enroll and expand access to eligible populations.
13 The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted extreme economic hardship
14 on many individuals in this State, who might now become eligible
15 for the WIC program. It is proper and fitting that this House urges
16 the federal government to modernize access to WIC and promote
17 flexible methods for program enrollment and benefit issuance.