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.
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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 20	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 23	130,000 total participants each year; and WHEREAS. There is strong avidence that the program reduces the risk
23 24	WHEREAS, There is strong evidence that the program reduces the risk of preterm birth, low birth weight, and infant mortality, particularly
24 25	for the African American community ; and
26	WHEREAS, Mothers qualify for WIC during pregnancy and for up to a
20	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

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1 urges the federal government to modernize access to the WIC and 2 promote flexible methods for program enrollment and benefit 3 issuance; now, therefore, 4 5 BE IT RESOLVED by the General Assembly of the State of New 6 Jersey: 7 8 1. This House respectfully urges the federal government to 9 continue to modernize access to the Special Supplemental Nutrition 10 Program for Women, Infants, and Children allowing for more 11 flexible methods of program enrollment and benefit issuance. 12 13 2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State, 14 shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly to the 15 President of the United States and the Secretary of Agriculture. 16 17 18 **STATEMENT** 19 20 This Assembly resolution respectfully urges the federal government to continue to modernize access to the Special 21 22 Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, 23 also known as WIC, to allow for more flexible methods of program 24 enrollment and benefit issuance. 25 The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) began 26 operating WIC, a federal assistance program for healthcare and 27 nutrition of low-income pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and children under the age of five, through state agencies in 1974. 28 29 The WIC program is currently the largest federal nutrition program 30 after the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 31 the National School Lunch Program. New Jersey WIC is a 32 preventive public health nutrition program which utilizes various 33 strategies to reduce the risk of poor pregnancy outcomes and to 34 facilitate the improvement of the nutritional and health status of 35 low-income pregnant, postpartum, breastfeeding women, as well as To accomplish this goal, the program 36 infants and children. 37 identifies and provides services that prevent nutritional and health 38 problems, such as health screenings and nutritional counseling. On 39 average, the New Jersey WIC program serves over 130,000 total 40 participants each year. 41 There is strong evidence that the program reduces the risk of 42 preterm birth, low birth weight, and infant mortality, particularly among the African American community. Mothers qualify for WIC 43 44 during pregnancy and for up to a year after, and children qualify 45 until age five, with eligibility based on enrollment in other federal 46 programs such as SNAP and Medicaid or by income and nutritional

47 risk criteria. Despite the demonstrated nutritional and health

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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 certification. In order to provide state agencies the flexibility to 6 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.