



## **Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**

Amber O'Connor, Food Policy Analyst, Every Texan

March 11, 2025

Chair Kolkhorst, Vice Chair Perry, and esteemed committee members,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. My name is Amber O'Connor, and I work for Every Texan. We are against SB 379 because it creates barriers to food access by moving the onus of determining product eligibility to small businesses and increasing administrative oversight to an already overburdened HHSC. But, I want to call attention to how this bill will affect people. Allow me to share two scenarios.

First, the bill says you can buy certain items only if recommended by a health professional. You're a parent in West Texas. Your child has strep throat, the doctor recommended you use sweetened juice to hide the taste of antibiotics, so you drive 20 minutes to buy some. You're between pay days and need to purchase it on your SNAP card. You can barely afford gas for this trip. As you check out, the clerk at the counter says you can't buy it. You explain your doctor's advice, but out of fear of sanctions, and because the clerk has no evidence of the doctor's recommendation, they refuse. The same holds true for candy for diabetic crashes, popsicles for tonsillectomies -- how will the clerk know?

Second, you received this month's benefit and head to the only grocer who accepts SNAP on your bus route. As you check out, you are informed they no longer accept SNAP due to cost of updating the point of sale with each individual item that meets each of the new convoluted requirements. They stopped accepting SNAP because it cost the retailer too much to maintain the program. HHSC will have to make the decisions about which items are SNAP eligible on an item-by-item basis and train and monitor the vendors instead of relying on federally provided training and technical support materials. This ongoing bureaucratic burden is unsustainable.

It also bears mentioning, this bill will do additional harm to people living in shelters or people experiencing homelessness, as they do not have access to kitchens or refrigeration.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify against SB 379.