

To the Honorable members of the House Health & Social Services Committee,

We represent a number of Anchorage small businesses primarily serving minority customers. On behalf of our customers, our community and our business interests we whole-heartedly support House Bill 380. Expanding WIC vendor eligibility would allow those of us who serve minority communities with significant language barriers to accept WIC vouchers.

In Alaska, two groups have been significantly affected by the narrowed WIC vendor eligibility: small businesses like us and our customers. Locally-owned businesses have been excluded from these regulations, which have come at a great cost to minority communities like ours. The diverse minority groups that make our Anchorage neighborhoods vibrant rely on stores like ours to meet their unique cultural needs. When these minority populations also rely on WIC, local shops like ours play an even more fundamental role within the community.

HB 380 would also help address how current WIC regulations prioritize corporate big-box chains over small businesses like ours. We accept that controlling costs has to be an important consideration of programs like WIC but the fundamental purpose of WIC is to help those who are most vulnerable. Giving preference to corporate chain stores that don't employ people that speak the language of these minority customers at the expense of those local entrepreneurs that do is counterproductive to this end.

We all have a mutual interest in creating a cultural component to Alaskan WIC regulations is critical to the health of our communities. Small businesses like ours enrich the neighborhoods we serve by providing for their unique needs better than larger retail chains. We urge you to seek a waiver to expand WIC vendor eligibility requirements in Alaska.

Support small businesses and pass HB 380.