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Monday, April 24th, 2017

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****RELEASE****

Senator Marisol Alcántara Passes Bill to Stop Arbitrary Refusal of WIC Reimbursements

Bill protecting small business owners, mothers, and children passes State Senate 59-0.

Albany, NY - State Senator Marisol Alcántara (D-Manhattan) passed a bill through the State Senate today that adds desperately needed transparency and justice to the reimbursement process for the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). In this program, which is funded by the federal government and administered by the Department of Health, eligible low-income parents are given checks that can only purchase specific items for their children. However, in New York today, many small supermarkets and bodegas are reluctant to accept WIC benefit checks because of the inconsistent system of reimbursement for those checks. The Department of Health offers no reason for rejecting WIC reimbursement, charges burdensome bank fees to stores that are rejected, and does not publish WIC reimbursement rates. This state of affairs is bad for children, bad for parents, and bad for small businesses. However, if the State Assembly joins the State Senate in passing this bill, the Department of Health will have to notify vendors periodically of reimbursement rates for WIC items, and if the reimbursement is rejected, store owners will only be liable for the difference between the price charged and the assessment of the Department of Health. This will incentivize store owners to honor WIC benefit checks and help more children receive the nutrition they need.

Senator Alcántara said: "I urge my Assembly colleagues to quickly pass this bill. Small business owners that are the lifeblood of New York should not be put in a position where they are penalized for providing necessary nutrition to low-income mothers and children. Mothers and children requiring such benefits should be able to find them wherever these items are sold."

"The New York State Department of Health (DOH) policy that removed labeled values from WIC vouchers, while not unfounded, has left Supermarkets flying blind when it comes to pricing certain items. You know the system is not working when it ends up disproportionately costing supermarkets in high need areas that are already struggling with skyrocketing operating costs, perpetuating a cycle of decreasing access to affordable, healthy groceries," said Rudy Fuertes, President, National Supermarket Association. "Basic safeguards that notify each vendor of a check rejection and the reason for that

rejection, hold them accountable only for the difference in price and implement rules whereby vendors do not pay tens of thousands of dollars in bounced WIC fees will eradicate arbitrary imposed penalties and encourage more vendors to accept WIC benefits at their stores. We want to thank Senator Alcantara for her leadership and New York State senator for their unanimous support. We look forward to working with the Assembly and DOH to resolve this issue before the end of session."

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