



# CITY OF MERCED

June 10, 2025

The Honorable Susan Rubio  
California State Senate  
1021 O Street, Room 7230  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 18 (Rubio) – Food Desert Elimination Grant Program – SUPPORT – (As Amended May 8, 2025)**

Dear Senator Rubio:

On behalf of the City of Merced, I am pleased to express our strong support for Senate Bill 18, which would establish the Food Desert Elimination Grant Program under the Department of Food and Agriculture. This program is a critical step toward addressing food insecurity by expanding access to healthy foods in designated food deserts and areas at risk of becoming food deserts.

As a community that faces ongoing challenges with equitable food access, the City of Merced understands the importance of ensuring that all residents, regardless of neighborhood or income level, can obtain fresh and nutritious food. SB 18 would provide much-needed resources to grocery store operators—both large and small-scale—to establish or expand operations in underserved areas. The proposed grant funding for site feasibility studies, capital improvements, workforce costs, and infrastructure development would directly support the growth of sustainable food retail in communities like ours.

We particularly appreciate the bill's flexibility in allowing grants to be awarded not only to new grocery store operators but also to existing stores within food deserts. This approach ensures that reinvestment in long-standing community markets remains a priority alongside new development.

By facilitating public-private partnerships and leveraging state and non-state funds, SB 18 reflects a thoughtful and strategic approach to a complex issue. The City of Merced supports this measure as a vital investment in public health, economic vitality, and community resilience.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue, and we respectfully urge the Legislature to pass SB 18. If you have any questions, please contact Sharon Gonsalves at California Public Policy Group (916) 974-9270.

Sincerely,

**Matthew Serratto**  
Mayor  
City of Merced

cc: Members and Staff of the Assembly Committee on Agriculture  
Senator Anna Caballero  
Assemblymember Esmeralda Soria  
League of California Cities