

Written Statement of Steve Brophy, Vice President of Government Affairs  
Dollar General Corporation  
Given to the Georgia State Senate's Study Committee on Improving Access  
to Healthy Foods and Ending Food Deserts  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Study Committee, thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Steve Brophy, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs for Dollar General Corporation.

Today, I will be speaking about food insecurity, and the role Dollar General is playing in expanding access to healthy and fresh foods in rural, suburban, and urban communities – many of which are located in Federally-designated food deserts and areas with limited access to healthy, nutritious alternatives.

Before diving directly in, I want to give you some top line context about Dollar General and our presence in Georgia. Our company has been in business for more than 80 years and pioneered the concept of “Dollar Stores” back in the 1950’s. Though we have moved on from the dollar concept, we remain a value-oriented general merchandise retailer. By store count, we are the largest retailer in the country with 17,600 stores in 46 states. Interestingly, approximately 75% of the American population lives within 5 miles of a Dollar General Store. As for the Peach State, we operate 992 stores in Georgia. 154 of those are in the counties represented by the Senators of this Study Committee.

Our investment in this state and its people through jobs and careers is significant.

We subscribe to a philosophy of “EDLP” or Everyday Low Price, which means that customers can count on Dollar General to provide them with quality products they need at prices they can afford every day. We do this by leveraging our scale for the benefit of our customers.

Our stores often are located in communities that other retailers have chosen not to serve, and our easy in-and-out store format allows our customers to get what they need quickly. One of our tag lines is “Save Time. Save Money”, and I believe those four words accurately capture our business proposition.

We also leverage our scale to address the needs of the communities we serve. Our mission of “Serving Others” is a powerful one, and we live that mission every day – in ways that not only set us apart from other retailers, but that are redefining the very concept of what a general merchandise retailer can be. “Serving Others” means investing in the communities we call home — whether that’s through the nearly \$200 million we’ve invested through our Literacy Foundation to support more than 14 million Americans taking their first steps toward literacy, getting their GED, or learning English; or whether it’s through using our footprint to facilitate Covid vaccination sites in communities where access to the vaccine may be harder to

come by — bringing vaccines directly to customers in the communities where they live, which includes vaccination sites here in Georgia that came online just last week, with more expected to come online soon.

All this brings me to the topic at hand, increasing access to healthy, affordable foods. You must know that not all retailers are the same – much less those often referred to as “dollar stores”. At Dollar General, we are proud of the significant strides we’ve made over the past few years in regard to our food assortment. Importantly, four critical elements differentiate Dollar General from others in the discount retail sector:

First is the components of a healthy diet we offer at every store. The several nutritionists and dieticians that we have worked with on this topic (from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to metro health departments, to advocacy groups and independent professionals) have all affirmed that customers can source healthy meals at a Dollar General. The challenge is more about knowing how best to do that. Indeed, every Dollar General store offers milk, eggs, grains, lean proteins, vegetables, fruit and other components of a healthy diet.

The second is our work with nutritionists to help families build on that healthy assortment. We have set about helping our customers make the most of these offerings for their families by partnering with a registered dietician, Mary Alice Cain, to create good-tasting, healthy and affordable dishes and posting those recipes on our website.

Mary Alice herself is an interesting story. She is a Georgian who, while working on her master’s in nutrition at Georgia State, chose to challenge the negative stereotypes of Dollar General and create a book of 30 recipes that were both healthy and affordable. Her professor was skeptical, but Mary Alice was not only able to create the recipes, she was able to get our attention and now, as an adviser, she builds recipes and counsels our buyers on our healthier “Better for You” assortment. We believe that this “Better For You” initiative is already helping, and will continue to help, our customers make healthier eating decisions.

Third is our DG Fresh Initiative, which is a strategic effort to self-distribute our frozen and refrigerated products and allow us greater latitude regarding the items we carry. Before this initiative, we were limited in our ability to carry certain products, and we incurred additional distribution expense. Now, however, we have the ability to use our scale to fill our freezers and coolers with items our customers need and want at prices they can afford. This initiative depends upon a network of cold storage facilities like the one we operate in the Atlanta area.

The fourth is the unprecedented progress we are making to bring fresh produce to thousands of communities across the country. Senators, by the end of this fiscal year, Dollar General expect to have added fresh produce to an additional 1,000 stores, totaling 2,300 stores across our chain that carry produce. We recently stated our expectation expand our offering of fresh produce to 10,000 stores over the next 10 years with a meaningful number of those stores in food deserts. No other national retailer, and certainly no other retailer in the small box discount retailer space, is more focused on this issue than Dollar General.

We are not only helping to create increased access to fresh, healthy, affordable foods within the walls of our stores, but also working closely with organizations who are leading the fight against food insecurity. After piloting the relationship in a subset of our Georgia stores and distribution centers, Dollar General announced a tremendous partnership with Feeding America to leverage our enterprise to help feed those in need. Importantly, in addition to our \$1,000,000 donation, our partnership will double the number of retail outlets to which Feeding America partners have access. Once fully executed, we anticipate the partnership will yield up to 20 million meals a year.

Given the sheer volume of stores located throughout Georgia— our presence and reach into communities across the Peach State uniquely positions us to continue playing a critical role in helping to provide nutritious, affordable foods, and where appropriate fresh produce empowering customers to make healthier choices for their families in all corners of this state.

Mr. Chairman, we are not blind to the baseless rhetoric that so-called dollar stores exacerbate the impacts of food deserts. But insofar as this rhetoric is used against Dollar General, it is just that – baseless. Food deserts have existed for decades, long before Dollar General was the brand that it is today. Anyone who has done even a cursory review of the many studies over the years seeking to understand the drivers behind food deserts will tell you that the causes are many and complex.

Blaming the discount retail segment and Dollar General in particular — without evidence or data — is not only irresponsible, it’s potentially harmful to the very individuals that we all seek to serve. As articulated by the CEO and Co-Founder of *Growing Augusta*, Karen Gordon, who is working to build a food oasis in South Richmond County and who delivered testimony to this Committee just last month, *“By placing moratoriums on dollar stores ... we end up punishing the very people we intend to help.”* (Source: [testimony page 5](#), Aug. 25)

Senators, there is no credible evidence to support the notion that Dollar General limits traditional grocers from entering or serving a community. To the contrary, industry data from [Inmar Analytics](#) indicates the grocery store industry is not growing in any meaningful way – irrespective of “dollar stores.” This trend — and not the growth of Dollar General and other small box retailers — is far more likely the reason that many communities are struggling to attract traditional grocers.

In many instances, Dollar General stores complement local grocery stores, providing community members with both a traditional grocery experience and an affordable general merchandise option. We are grateful for the opportunity to help fill this gap and serve customers that would otherwise not have access to an affordable retail option. This proximity with a local grocer not only keeps jobs and tax dollars within a local community, but it also means that customers are able to save money on the items they need so they have money to purchase the items they want.

Building relationships at the local level have proven to be beneficial for all parties, especially for constituents. Though Dollar General is not a grocery store — we are a general merchandise store — that has not stopped us from investing in the health of our customers. This means everything from launching initiatives like DG Fresh and Better For You, to expanding healthy food options in many communities where there are none.

As I mentioned, by the end of this fiscal year, we expect that more than 2,300 Dollar General stores will offer a meaningful selection of fresh produce. One of these communities is Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

In 2019, Baton Rouge Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome sought to increase fresh produce access for her residents — many of whom live in food deserts. Mayor Broome contacted Dollar General to build a public-private relationship for the benefit of Baton Rouge residents, which resulted in a collaboration between Dollar General and the Mayor's Healthy City Initiative to not only find a solution to address food insecurity challenges, but to create programming and resources that help residents of Baton Rouge's food desert communities learn how to make affordable, heart-healthy meals with food available at Dollar General.

The collaboration resulted in Dollar General not only partnering with the American Heart Association and local hospitals to provide healthy cooking classes, but also bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to two Baton Rouge Dollar General stores serving communities with low access to fresh produce. The stores now offer a curated assortment of fresh produce, including lettuce, tomatoes, onions, apples, strawberries, potatoes, sweet potatoes, lemons, limes, salad mixes, and more.

We have not limited our commitment to the health of our customers to our food assortment. Indeed, we have spent a considerable amount of time optimizing our over-the-counter healthcare section of our stores in order to provide more and better items for our customers. This effort has led to our recent announcement of hiring the first Chief Medical Officer for the Company. In this role, Dr. Albert Wu will work to leverage the Dollar General footprint and scale to provide goods or facilitate services that help our customers live healthier lives.

The hiring of Dr. Wu, the expansion of the DG Wellbeing initiative, and the many ways we're already leveraging our presence in communities to bring life-saving vaccines to rural and underserved communities underscores the emphasis we are placing on bringing health and wellness to the communities we serve.

Coupled with our commitment to expanding access to healthy food offerings we provide — and our ongoing efforts to fight food insecurity — Dollar General is becoming even more relevant and integral to the communities we serve.

Senators, thank you again for your kind invitation and I will make myself available to you for questions.