

Officials' support of food stamps welcome

As pediatricians and researchers from the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program, who daily observe life's harsh realities for low-income families, we must respond to an editorial, "Challenging statistics: Food stamp gimmick intentionally misleading" (Telegram & Gazette, Oct. 24), criticizing U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Worcester, and Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino for taking the Food Stamp Diet Challenge and eating for one week on the average benefit received by Massachusetts households — \$1 per person per meal. While food stamps are not intended to cover a household's entire food budget, the benefit formula assumes that low-income households have additional income to pay for food. However, most food-stamp eligible families have few resources given rising costs for housing and fuel.

Pediatric research shows that food stamps help to buffer children from food insecurity's harmful effects. Children whose families receive food stamps are 26 percent less likely to be food insecure than eligible children whose families aren't receiving them. Food stamps buffer families from harmful trade-offs between basic needs.

Food stamps are good medicine; however, the current dose is just too low. We describe this as sub-therapeutic, like not giving someone the full dose of antibiotics. It helps, but it doesn't cure the infection. A recent Boston study showed that the monthly cost of the diet upon which the food stamp benefit is based costs \$27 more than the maximum food stamp benefit.

For a few days, several elected officials who can command media attention did something to experience a low-income person's life. We applaud their efforts.

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