



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Evans announces supermarkets a priority in economic stimulus package

HARRISBURG, March 31 -- The state House of Representatives today approved legislation that authorizes \$1.135 billion in debt to invest in economic development programs in Pennsylvania. [Senate Bill 1026](#) passed 188 - 7. This is a major portion of Gov. Rendell's economic stimulus package, proposed during his 2003 budget address.

State Rep. Dwight Evans, D-Phila., worked hard for a provision that would provide financial assistance to urban and rural supermarkets in underserved areas.

"Access to grocery stores has long been an issue in large urban areas as well as our smaller, rural communities," said Evans. "Access to fresh, nutritious, affordable groceries and produce is critical to the health of every community."

Evans, Democratic chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said lack of supermarkets countered by the easy availability of fast food restaurants and convenience stores, has helped to contribute to several health issues, including obesity, diabetes and hypertension.

Under the First Industries portion of the stimulus package, \$150 million in financial assistance would be available for agriculture and tourism projects. Under the agriculture portion, supermarkets would be eligible for planning grants, direct loans and loan guarantees.

Supermarkets could request planning grants for costs associated with pre-development activities and feasibility studies of a project. The grants would be limited to projects that benefit the local economy or well-being of a neighborhood.

A supermarket could also request a low-interest loan for land and building acquisition, construction, machinery and equipment purchases, and working capital. Interest rates could be as low as 2 percent and as high as 3.75 percent, depending on the purpose and circumstances.

A loan guarantee could be made by a commercial lending institution to assist with the financing of a supermarket project. To be eligible, the project would have to receive a planning grant or have at least \$1 million of private funding. The guarantee could not exceed 50 percent of the outstanding principal.

Evans thanked state Reps. Frank Oliver, Jake Wheatley, John Myers, Louise Bishop, Kathy Manderino and George Kenney for pushing so hard on this issue.

“Whether we live in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Meadville, Boiling Springs, or Aaronsburg, we all deserve access to fresh, quality groceries and produce,” he said.

Evans said several states have looked at this issue but Pennsylvania would be the first to create a statewide supermarket-directed development program of its kind.

“Although this is only one component of the stimulus package, it is an important first step for the health of our families, friends, neighbors and communities.”

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