A statewide poll was released last week that shows that North Carolinians view unhealthy eating and childhood obesity as the most serious problems facing children in the United States, above physical activity, quality of education and children not spending enough time outdoors. The poll also found that 70 percent of North Carolina registered voters support the creation of a Healthy Corner Store Initiative as a way of reducing the state’s childhood obesity epidemic. Even better, a similar majority says that state and local governments should provide training and incentives to encourage neighborhood stores, where people often shop for groceries, to stock healthy foods.

This is especially exciting for those of us here in Greenville, because Pitt County has been a leader in creating the healthy corner store movement. We have a number of examples that demonstrate how a local convenience store can stock and sell healthy and local nutritious food in neighborhoods that don’t have ready access to grocery stores or farmers’ markets. Store owners working with our local health department have found a way to be successful and serve their communities.

Now it is time for the rest of the state to benefit from what we have learned here in Pitt County. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative will improve availability, affordability and accessibility of healthy foods in corner stores within areas of poor food access. This approach would not only remove a barrier to healthy eating, but also create new business opportunities. If the focus also includes healthy foods grown and/or produced in North Carolina, the state could realize a triple win in terms of health, economic growth for our farmers and community revitalization.

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