

CITY OF BALTIMORE

MAYOR STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Olivia D. Farrow, Esq., R.S.

Interim Commissioner

1001 E. Fayette Street

Baltimore, MD 21202

<http://www.baltimorehealth.org>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT: Brian Schleiter

PHONE: 443-984-2623

Mediahealth@baltimorecity.gov

Virtual Supermarket Program Provides Food Access to Underserved Communities

BALTIMORE, MD (March 17, 2010) – The Baltimore City Health Department has launched the Virtual Supermarket Project, allowing residents in and around East Baltimore and the Washington Village neighborhood to order groceries online at their local libraries and pick them up at the same locations the next day. It is currently operating at the Washington Village and Orleans Street Enoch Pratt Free Library branches.

“This program will make these neighborhoods stronger and healthier, allowing residents the same access to full-service, competitively priced grocery stores that much of the rest of the city enjoys,” said Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake.

Both sites are located in “food deserts,” or areas without access to healthy food options. The surrounding neighborhoods were identified as having the greatest need for the project. Washington Village has the 6th highest mortality burden out of the 55 city community areas for causes of death related to diet, including heart disease, stroke and diabetes. The Perkins/Middle East neighborhood ranked 19th in this category.

“In many densely populated cities, including Baltimore, residents of some communities must choose between shopping at small corner stores that lack fresh produce or paying a premium for a ride far outside their area. This is not a fair choice,” said Interim Commissioner Farrow. “We are hoping that if this program is successful, we can partner with more grocery stores and expand the program to other areas of Baltimore where there is need.”

The Virtual Supermarket Project was piloted last year as an innovative way to address food access problems in Baltimore City. It is funded by a \$60,000 grant. The Health Department partnered with the Enoch Pratt Free Library, which offered to house the program. Santoni’s Supermarket, a long-time Baltimore City grocer, is currently the primary provider of supermarket items for the program. The Center for Design Practice at MICA provided ideas on marketing/branding the project.

A neighborhood designated as a food desert has no supermarkets within walking distance and lacks other resources that would provide healthy, inexpensive food. Corner stores and fast food or take-out restaurants are common in these areas, but they generally only offer unhealthy options. Healthy staples at corner stores, if they are available, can cost as much as 20% more than they would cost in supermarkets. Few residents of the neighborhoods targeted by the

program own their own vehicles (66% of the households in the Perkins/Middle East area do not have vehicles, 48% in Washington Village), making travel to a distant supermarket an obstacle.

At the Orleans Street branch, residents may order their groceries each Wednesday between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m., and collect their orders the following day between 1 and 2 p.m. The Orleans Street library is located at 1303 Orleans Street (21231). Residents of the Washington Village area may order at their library branch on Mondays between noon and 3 p.m., and pick up their orders each Tuesday between 1 and 2 p.m. The Washington Village library is located at 856 Washington Boulevard (21230). Accepted forms of payment include cash, checks, credit cards and food stamps.

For more information on the Virtual Supermarket Program, visit our Website at <http://www.baltimorehealth.org/virtualsupermarket.html>.

###