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New Ochs Center Study Links Grocery Store Location to Prices Parts of County Lack Access to Food and Residents Pay More

A study by the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies, **Food Access and Price**, found that while Hamilton County and Chattanooga residents overall have adequate access to grocery stores, residents in parts of the inner city of Chattanooga and the outlying areas of the county lack access and as a result pay higher prices for essential food items.

With approximately 1.7 grocery stores per 10,000 residents in the county, the county overall exceeded the minimum standard for acceptable access of one store per 10,000 residents. But six out of thirty six subregions in the county fell below the standard – including four subregions with no grocery stores. In some more rural outlying parts of the county – like Bakewell and Birchwood – and more urban areas in the city of Chattanooga – like East Chattanooga and Highland Park – more than three-quarters of residents need to travel more than a mile to the closest grocery store.

The Ochs Center study also found that access is linked to price. Based on a market basket survey, residents of East Chattanooga and Highland Park/Bushtown – where there are no grocery

stores, only fringe food outlets – pay prices for food that are approximately thirty percent higher than the county average and approximately fifty percent higher than prices in East Ridge.

In response to the Ochs Center study, County Mayor Claude Ramsey said that "it is unfortunate in this day and age to see that some people do not have easy access to good nutrition in their own neighborhoods. I believe we as a community need to work together to come up with creative ways to make sure that all people have access to economical foods that provide good nutrition and also help reduce our health care costs."

State Senator Andy Berke, who represents many of the areas lacking access to grocery stores in Hamilton County, pledged to work with County and other officials to overcome access issues. "We know that there is a problem; now, we need to push solutions. I will be working over the coming legislative session to see how the State can create incentives to help grocery stores locate in needed areas. This issue affects my constituents from both a health and an important economic perspective."

David Eichenthal, President of the Ochs Center, said that, "residents of these parts of the city and outlying parts of the county – some with high concentrations of low income residents – are paying more for basic food items. If they stay in their own neighborhood, they pay more for less. And if they travel to other neighborhoods to shop, it frequently means higher costs for taxis or public transportation. In too many cases, the poor are paying more."

The Ochs Center examined the location of grocery stores and other food outlets in Hamilton County and conducted a food price survey in over 100 grocery stores, supermarkets and other stores this past summer. **Food Access and Price** is a follow up to an Ochs Center analysis earlier this year that found that more than 70% of outlets that accept food stamps are “fringe food” outlets that often do not carry fresh produce.

Food Access and Price was authored by Lori Quillen, Policy Analyst at the Ochs Center for Metropolitan Studies. The full study is available at www.ochscenter.org.

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