



January 30, 2018

The Honorable Eric T. Costello
Chair, Judiciary and Legislative Investigations Committee
Baltimore City Council
100 N. Holliday Street
Suite 500
Baltimore, MD 21202

Re: City Council Bill No. 17-0152, Food Service Facilities - Healthy Beverages for Children's Meals

Dear Chairman Costello and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) strongly supports Council Bill 17-0152, which will promote the health of Baltimore's children by making healthier beverages the default choice with restaurant children's meals.

CSPI is a nonprofit organization supported by our more than 500,000 members, including more than 800 active members in Baltimore. Since 1971, we have worked to make it easier for people to eat healthfully so they can avoid heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, and other diet- and obesity-related diseases. CSPI has led successful efforts to secure Nutrition Facts labels on packaged foods, improve school food, ensure calories are labeled on menus at chain restaurants, and remove trans fat from the food supply.

Nationally, one-third of children and adolescents are overweight or obese.¹ In Baltimore, the prevalence rate is higher; 47 percent of school-age children in Baltimore are overweight or obese.² Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to struggle with weight issues in adulthood, leading to increased risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes.^{3,4} Children with obesity also are at risk for social and emotional health consequences stemming from stigmatization and social discrimination, which can negatively impact academic success and social development.³

Sugary drinks, including soda, sugary fruit drinks, and sports drinks, are a top source of calories in children's diets.⁵ At fast-food and table-service restaurants, sugary beverages are often sold as part of children's meals or on children's menus.⁶ Sugary drinks are often automatically included with children's meals, adding unnecessary calories with little or no nutritional benefit.⁷

Designating particular foods and beverages as children's menu items or bundling them together as children's meals is a powerful form of marketing that helps to establish food norms for children, which could affect their preferences and lifelong eating patterns.⁸

This bill will help make the healthier choice—water, milk, or 100% juice—easier for parents to make, while protecting their freedom to choose what they prefer for their children.

CSPI and other members of the Food Marketing Workgroup have been working to encourage restaurants to improve the nutritional quality of their children's meals. Several of the largest national restaurant chains have already voluntarily removed sugary drinks as an offering on their children's menus. Since 2013, McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, Dairy Queen, IHOP, Jack in the Box, and Applebee's have taken soda and other sugary drinks off their children's menus. Subway and Panera also do not promote sugary drinks to children. While some progress has been made, there is still a long way to go. In a report released last summer, CSPI found that although the percentage of top restaurant chains offering sugary drinks on children's menus has declined in recent years, from 93 percent in 2008 and 83 percent in 2012, 74 percent of the top chains still offer sugary drinks on children's menus.⁶

Some states and localities frustrated with the slow pace of change are turning to public policy to improve restaurant children's meals in their own communities. The cities of Davis, Stockton, Perris, Berkeley, Cathedral City, Long Beach, and Daly City and Santa Clara County in California, and the city of Lafayette in Colorado, have all adopted healthy default beverage ordinances. Similar policies have been introduced or are being considered in other jurisdictions nationwide. A statewide poll shows that nearly 70 percent of Marylanders support legislation to make healthier beverages the default option for children's meals.⁹

We urge Baltimore to join this growing movement. Healthier children's meals can reduce sugary drink consumption, encourage children to form healthy eating habits, and support the efforts of parents to feed their children well. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Hillary Caron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hillary Caron
Senior Nutrition Policy Associate

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1. Fryar CD, Carroll MD, Ogden CL. *Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity Among Children and Adolescents Aged 2-19 Years: United States, 1963-1965 Through 2013-2014*. Hyattsville, M.D.: National Center for Health Statistics; 2016.
 2. Maryland Department of Health. *Environmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) County Profile: Baltimore City*. Available at: https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/OEHFP/EH/tracking/Shared%20Documents/County-Profiles/BaltimoreCity_Final.pdf.
 3. Sahoo K, Sahoo B, Choudhury AK, Sofi NY, Kumar R, Bhadoria AS. Childhood obesity: causes and consequences. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*. 2015;4(2):187-192.
 4. Kelsey MM, Zaepfel A, Bjornstad P, Nadeau KJ. Age-related consequences of childhood obesity. *Gerontology*. 2014;60(3):222-228.
 5. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at: <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>.
 6. Ribakove S, Almy J, Wootan MG. *Soda on the Menu: Improvements Seen but More Change Needed for Beverages on Restaurant Children’s Menus*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Science in the Public Interest, 2017.
 7. Harris JL, Schwartz MB, Munsell CR, et al. *Fast Food FACTS 2013: Measuring Progress in Nutrition and Marketing to Children and Teens*. New Haven, C.T.: Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity; 2013.
 8. Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2006.
 9. Reeder-Thompson B. Healthier Drink Options Head to the Hill in Maryland. Voices for Healthy Kids Action Center. <https://orgs-voicesactioncenter.nationbuilder.com/inside-track-march-12-a>. Published March 12, 2015. Accessed January 29, 2018.