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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

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MEMORANDUM

TO: All House Members

FROM: Representative Michael F. Gerber *MFG*

DATE: June 7, 2011

SUBJECT: Co-sponsorship: Pennsylvania Healthy Schools Act

In the near future, I plan to offer legislation that would establish healthy food requirements for Pennsylvania's schools. These requirements will improve student health, improve student achievement and save tax dollars.

As you may recall, I introduced similar bi-partisan legislation last session, which passed the House Health and Human Services Committee in June of 2010.

Unfortunately, there is no doubt that childhood obesity has reached epidemic levels. Studies show that 1 in 3 Pennsylvania children struggle with obesity and other long-term diseases like diabetes and hypertension—a number that has increased 37 percent in the last decade alone. While it is not surprising that such trends mirror an increase in consumption of soda and other sugary drinks, the fact that more than 60 percent of high schools and junior high schools sell these products is often overlooked.¹

The long term impacts of the rise of childhood obesity are truly alarming. Overweight and obese children are at a higher risk for heart disease, diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, certain cancers and gallbladder disease. Additionally, overweight children also suffer psychological stress, poor body image, low self-esteem and a greater likelihood of developing obesity as an adult.²

According to the 2007 Healthy Youth Survey, the consumption of sugary foods and beverages also has a major impact on student achievement. Students who drink two or more sodas per day are twice as likely to have academic drop-off as students who drink one or none. The same study also reported that overweight children are 50 percent more likely to face academic risks.³

Not only does childhood obesity affect the health and welfare of children, but also creates an enormous burden on Pennsylvania's taxpayer funded health system. A 2004 study that tracked

¹ Journal of the American Medical Association, 2002

² The Center for Disease Control

³ Healthy Youth Study, 2007

Medicare and Medicaid obesity related expenditures showed that obesity costs Pennsylvania more than \$1.2 billion annually.⁴

There is little wonder why a 2005 study showed that 84 percent of Pennsylvania parents approve of limiting school vending machines to sell only water, fruit juice and milk and 79 percent of parents strongly oppose selling soda.⁵ Parents work hard to ensure a healthy lifestyle for their children and expect Pennsylvania's schools to be a partner in protecting their children.

My legislation will help provide healthier choices for Pennsylvania's students, lower the rate of childhood obesity, reduce obesity related health care expenditures and support parents by establishing the following guidelines for the sale of beverages, snack items and a la carte entrees:

Beverages

Elementary School:

- Bottled water;
- Seltzer water;
- 100% fruit and vegetable juice that is 8 ounces and up to 120 calories;
- Low fat or fat free milk up to 8 ounces.

Middle School:

- Bottled water;
- Seltzer water;
- 100% fruit and vegetable juice that is 10 ounces and up to 120 calories;
- Low fat or fat free milk up to 10 ounces.

High School:

- Bottled water;
- Seltzer water;
- 100% fruit and vegetable juice that is 12 ounces and up to 120 calories;
- Low fat or fat free milk up to 12 ounces
- Noncarbonated beverages with no more than 66 calories per eight ounces (excludes soda).

Snack Food Items

- Must contain less than or equal to 150 calories;
- Must contain less than or equal to 30% of calories from fat;

⁴ Finkelstein, Fiebelkorn, and Wang, 2003

⁵ Madonna and Young Research, 2005

- Must contain less than or equal to 35% of its weight from added sugars (fruit, vegetables and dairy items are excluded);
- Must contain less than or equal to 260 milligrams of sodium for snack items;
- Must contain zero grams of trans fat.

A La Cart Entrees

- Must contain less than or equal to 450 calories;
- Must contain less than or equal to 35% of its calories from fat;
- Must contain less than or equal to 10% of its calories from saturated fat;
- Must contain less than or equal to 650 milligrams of sodium;
- Must contain less than or equal to 35% of its weight from added sugars (fruit, vegetables and dairy items are excluded).
- Must contain zero grams of trans fat.

If you would like to co-sponsor this new legislation, please contact Melanie Brown at mabrown@pahouse.net or by calling her at 717-787-9475. Thank you.