



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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**BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Wednesday, February 21, 2007**

**RE: SENATE BILL 686, AAC ACCESS TO HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL
INFORMATION IN RESTAURANTS**

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and Public Health Committee members, I am pleased to provide written testimony today to support Senate Bill 686, An Act Concerning Access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants.

The Hospital of Saint Raphael (HSR) educates hundreds of patients and individuals each year about the importance of nutrition and making healthy food choices. We provide nutrition counseling through the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program to help moms to make nutritious choices for their families. Through our outpatient nutrition service and our inpatient education program, we provide nutrition counseling to hundreds of patients who struggle with obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, and other diseases. Our cardiac "Take Heart" program educates recovering cardiac patients about nutrition and physical fitness. For patients who face obesity and related illness, our surgeons are able to provide life-saving bariatric surgery.

The number of overweight children has doubled in the last 30 years, and today, one in every five American children is heavier than his or her optimal weight. That has led to an increase in obesity-related health problems, such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and other illnesses. For the last four years, we have also educated third-grade students and families at New Haven's Barnard Elementary School about nutrition, including the importance of choosing low-sugar, low-fat items and appropriate-size portions. The long-term goal of the third-grade nutrition program is to develop healthy lifestyles to avoid childhood obesity and the future risk of diabetes and heart disease.

It is difficult for the moms, families, and patients we work with to make healthy choices when they eat at restaurants where portions and recipes vary. Many items may appear to be healthy, but are, in fact, full of saturated or trans fat, sodium, or high calories. With the growing obesity rate in the United States, we cannot expect individuals, without dietetic degrees, to be able to distinguish the sodium, fat, carbohydrate, or calorie content of each item on restaurant menus. For diabetics, recovering cardiac patients, and all of us who need to make healthy food choices, Senate Bill 686 would provide us with the necessary information we need to make informed, conscientious decisions about the food we consume.

We encourage the Public Health Committee to pass Senate Bill 686, AAC Access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants. Vital nutrition information is essential for Connecticut's residents to make informed, educated decisions today and assure the health of our children for tomorrow. Thank you.