STATEMENT OF
JEROLD R. MANDE
S. B. No. 686
February 21, 2007

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on proposed S.B. No. 686, An Act Concerning Access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants.

My name is Jerold Mande and I co-chair the prevention committee of the Connecticut Cancer Partnership, the state cancer planning body. I am also associate director for public policy at the Yale Cancer Center, at the Yale University School of Medicine. Prior to coming to Yale I had the honor of working on cancer policy at the White House for Vice President Al Gore, and on nutrition policy at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for Commissioner David Kessler.

I am here today to testify in strong support for the enactment of S.B. 686. Providing Connecticut's residents with nutrition information on menus and menu boards in the state's chain restaurants is probably the most important step you can take to tackle the growing obesity epidemic. I want to commend Senator Williams, Senator Handley, and Senator Harp on authoring this essential legislation.

There are four points I would like to make today: 1) we are facing an obesity epidemic that requires urgent action, 2) the Connecticut Cancer Plan calls for nutrition labeling in chain restaurants, 3) menu and menu board labeling would finally complete the nation's nutrition labeling program, and 4) restaurant labeling will lead restaurants to return to more sensible and healthy meals.

We are in the midst of an obesity epidemic that some have predicted will make today's children the first generation of Americans to have shorter life spans than their parents. Attached to my testimony are three maps of the nation produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that graphically demonstrate how serious the problem is. As you will see, in just fifteen years we went from not having a single state with more than 15% of its population being obese to virtually every state having 20% or more of its population being obese.

The likely health consequences are enormous. For example, current patterns of overweight and obesity in the United States could account for an estimated 14% of all

deaths from cancer in men and 20% of those in women. This would make diet and obesity second only to tobacco in our fight against cancer.

Thus requiring labeling in restaurants will not only help the state tackle obesity, but it is also among the most important steps we can take to combat cancer. That is why the Connecticut Cancer Partnership called for "legislation to require large chain restaurants to put simple nutrition information, such as calories and the amount of fat, sugar, and salt, on their menu boards or menus," as part of the state cancer plan.

S.B.686 will also help complete the nation's nutrition information program. In 1992, while at the FDA, I had the privilege of leading the graphic design of the Nutrition Facts food panel that is now required on virtually all packaged foods. At that time, FDA leadership recommended to the Secretary of Health and Human Services that nutrition labeling also be required in chain restaurants. Given the growing number of meals consumed outside the home we were convinced that the goals of the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act would not be reached unless our program included chain restaurants. Unfortunately we lost that battle and the nation's health has suffered. You now have the opportunity to help correct that mistake and I urge you to do so.

Finally, restaurant labeling will lead restaurants to return to more sensible and healthy meals. As part of research I have done on obesity at Yale, I have interviewed a number of food designers. Food designers work for both the packaged food and restaurant industry. These are the people that the Cheesecake Factory and Campbell's hires when they want to add a new food item.

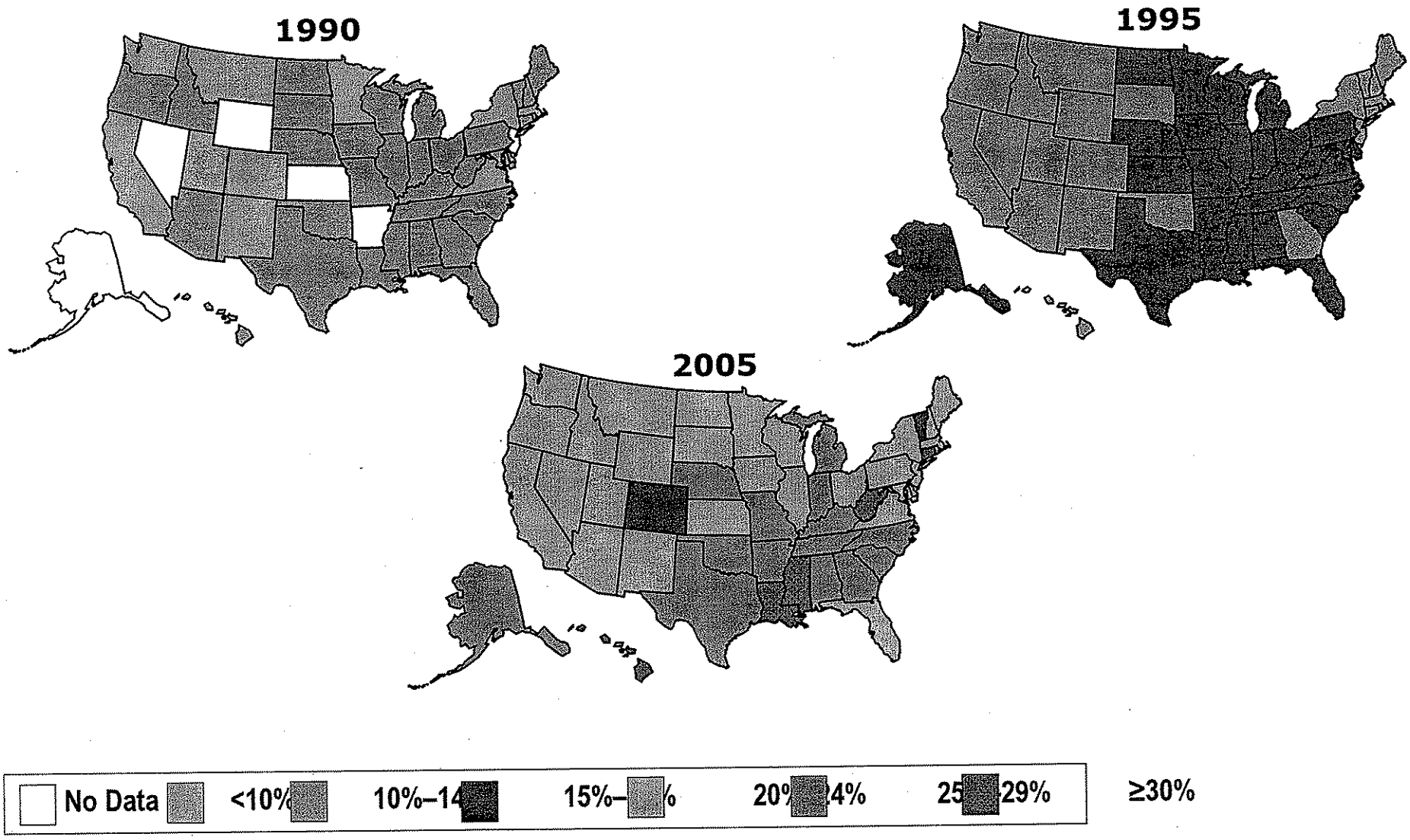
When I explained my role in designing the Nutrition Facts label, they each shared an important story on how that label changed what they do. When packaged food companies come to them they almost always bring a mock food label and explain that the new product must be designed around the label numbers. For example, there must be no trans fat, saturated fat and sodium must be low, and healthy nutrients high.

But when their restaurant clients are planning their new foods, there are no such restraints. In fact, as restaurants seek to provide an "eating experience" rather than a simple meal, designers have pushed the amount of calories, fat, sugar, and salt to unprecedented high levels. Their goal is no longer nutrition, but to increase the body's pleasurable response to foods. This unfortunately has become the standard in the design of too much restaurant fare.

Enacting S.B. 686 can help change that. It will help Connecticut fight obesity and cancer, it will give consumers the information they count on in the grocery store when they spend the other half of the their food dollar in restaurants, and it will provide a much needed incentive to the food industry to limit the calories, fat, and added sugar in restaurant food. I urge that you favorable report S.B. 686 and that it be passed into law as soon as possible.

Thank you.

Obesity Trends* Among U.S. Adults

BRFSS, 1990, 1995, 2005

(*BMI ≥30, or about 30 lbs overweight for 5'4" person)