



**END HUNGER CONNECTICUT! Inc.**

102 HUNGERFORD STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-4626 ¥ PHONE: 860 560-2100 ¥ FAX: 860 560-2108

### **Testimony in favor of Proposed SB 686, An Act Concerning Access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants**

Good afternoon Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan and I am the Executive Director of End Hunger Connecticut!, a statewide anti-hunger and food security organization with over 1,000 members. I am here today to speak in favor of Proposed SB 686, An Act Concerning Access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants.

Menu labeling is a policy whose time has come for Connecticut. This is not only an issue for those families with increased incomes but our cities host many more restaurants, fast and not, than the surrounding suburbs. Families with incomes of less than \$15,000 a year eat out an average of more than 3 meals a week – compared to those of higher incomes of over \$75,000 who eat out an average of 5 times a week. Families had more control over their caloric intake at home than they do at restaurants, given serving sizes, and basic knowledge of what is in a meal. Given the size of an entrée in addition to a beverage and dessert, it would not be uncommon for the meal to constitute half a day's worth of calories and in some instances, a whole day's worth.

Additionally, having menu information available to consumers will increase their knowledge of nutrition as well as letting them take responsibility for their food choices – it is very difficult to take personal responsibility for something without adequate information. Without nutrition information, it can be difficult to compare options and make informed choices at restaurants. Few people would guess that a tuna salad sandwich from a typical deli has 50 percent more calories than a roast beef with mustard; that a small milkshake has as many calories as a Big Mac; or that the BBQ ribs on a children's menu has fewer calories than the chicken nuggets. Consumers need the right tools to make informed decisions.

There are a number of people who go into those restaurants who eat the "healthy selections" without the knowledge that many of these meals are loaded with calories. An example would be that a "deluxe breakfast" at McDonald's weighs in over 1,200 calories, more than half of many people's suggested calories per day. An Egg McMuffin, hash browns and a small orange juice is 580 calories – still a lot of calories, but significantly less than the "deluxe breakfast". Do most people know that a bagel at Dunkin Donuts has more than twice the calories in it (not including the cream cheese) as a glazed donut? Menu labeling at the point of purchase can help people make decisions that affect their health. Instead of eating a whole bagel one might eat half of one, or go for the lower caloric donut choice. McDonald's is a good example of a restaurant that changed its menu to accommodate the public's need for choice with healthier foods. Creating some transparency on the food that we are buying creates changes in the restaurant industry, and the changes benefit the consumer, as well as the business.

A study conducted by the Center for Science in the Public Interest and New York University found that even well-trained nutrition professionals can't estimate the calorie content of popular restaurant meals. They consistently underestimated the number of calories and the

underestimations were substantial – by 200 to 600 calories. When shown a display of a typical hamburger and onion rings from a dinner house restaurant like T.G.I. Friday's or Applebee's, the dietitians estimated that it had 865 calories, when it actually contained 1,550 calories.

There are a number of factors that add extra calories to our diets however there is a direct correlation between increased calorie consumption and eating out at restaurants. For example, children eat almost twice as many calories when they eat a meal at a restaurant compared to at home (770 calories versus 420 calories). Women who eat out more than 5 days a week eat about 300 calories on average each day than women who eat out less often. Added calories, added saturated fat and fewer nutrients, and increased sodium can lead to diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes.

Given the current practice by many families to eat out on a regular basis, the current voluntary system for nutrition labeling in restaurants is inadequate. Approximately one-half of the largest chain restaurants don't provide any nutrition information to their customers. The 50 percent of chain restaurants that do provide nutrition information do so on websites, which requires people to have computers and internet access and to log on before leaving home, or on hard-to-find brochures in their stores or on fast-food wrappers or trayliners, which people don't see until after they order. Making this information available at the point of purchase allows consumers to make informed decisions when they need to. Since this bill only affects those restaurants chains with 10 or more restaurants this bill would require the headquarters, not individual restaurants, to analyze and create the menu labeling. That is something that could be done while they are creating new tantalizing meals.

I want to reiterate that this legislation only affects those restaurants chains with 10 or more restaurants. This will not affect small individually owned restaurants, mom and pop eateries, diners or roadside stands. The larger chains have the ability to analyze calorie content, as well as the budget to do so. Many will use this information to market their healthy choices – in fact more patrons may come to specific restaurants if they know that the nutrient information is readily available.

People have become accustomed to having nutrition information in supermarkets. And according to an industry-backed poll, 83 percent of Americans believe restaurants also should provide nutrition information. Three-quarters of adults report using food labels on packaged foods and almost half of consumers report that the nutrition information on food labels has caused them to change their minds about buying a food product. People who read nutrition labels are more likely to have a diet lower in fat and cholesterol and higher in vitamin C. Studies show that providing nutrition information at restaurants leads to lower calorie choices.

This legislation is good legislation as it allows consumers to make good personal choices, the ability to take responsibility for their food choices as well as creates incentives for larger chain restaurants to offer healthier selections. Additionally, Connecticut consumers will be given better ability to analyze and be better educated about nutritional choices, thereby subtly adding nutrition education into our everyday lives. I urge the passage of Proposed SB 686, An Act Concerning Access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants.

Thank you.