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This is a statement made on behalf of the members of the CT Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics to encourage the Public Health Committee to support **SB 1080: An Act Concerning Access to Health and Nutritional Information in Restaurants.**

Obesity is one of the greatest public health crises facing our nation and the state of Connecticut today, and the problem is growing. Over the past three decades, the percentage of American children fitting the definition of "obese" has skyrocketed. ("Obese" is considered a BMI at or above the 95th percentile of age- and gender-specific BMI charts developed by the CDC.) According to the Institute of Medicine, the obesity rate over the past thirty years has more than doubled for children aged 2-5 years and 12-19 years, and has more than tripled for children aged 6-11 years. In 2004, approximately nine million children over the age of 6 nationwide were considered obese – and the numbers are only growing. In 2005, one of every four Connecticut high school students were overweight or obese.

Extensive research has shown that obese children and adolescents grow into obese adults. Over 50% of obese 6-year-olds and at least 80% of overweight adolescents are projected to become obese adults. Here in the state of Connecticut, over half of all adults (59%) are overweight or obese.

Obese children face not only negative social consequences, but many potentially severe medical complications: greatly increased risk for Type II diabetes, hypertension, stroke, asthma, and heart disease. Obesity has played a key role in the skyrocketing rate of diabetes, which grew by 41% in just six years (1997-2003) among U.S. adults. In Connecticut alone, over 3,000 people die each year from obesity and its complications.

The cost is not just in lives and health – Medicaid and Medicare costs in Connecticut were increased by \$665 million in just one year due to obesity-related health problems. In the current economic climate, we cannot afford to spend this amount of money on such an easily preventable disease.

The New England Journal of Medicine published a study last month stating that number of calories consumed is the single most important factor in weight loss. In this proposed bill, the calorie count of menu items will be prominently displayed, helping citizens recognize the number of calories they will be consuming with each meal. Incorrect calorie estimations are rampant among all citizens, including trained nutritionists. In a 2007 study completed by the University of Connecticut's Center for Survey Research & Analysis, a large majority of consumers incorrectly assessed

all menu items presented, frequently guessing that the highest-calorie item had the fewest calories.

Furthermore, 82% of those surveyed were in support of displaying calorie content on restaurant menus and menu boards.

As pediatricians, we understand that parents can help their children develop and maintain healthful eating and physical activity habits, which will help prevent childhood obesity. We encourage parents to make healthy choices at home, and to reinforce and support healthy eating habits for their children. However, we are living in hectic times, and we understand that not all families are always able to cook and eat at home. When a family walks into a McDonald's or any other chain restaurant, they currently have no immediate information on the healthfulness of their dinner choices.

SB 1080 gives parents and kids some of the necessary tools they need when they enter a fast food restaurant. It will enable them to take our advice and put it into action, ensuring the health of their children now and in the years to come. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages our lawmakers to support this legislation.

The health of our children, our families, and our communities is worth it.