

Testimony before the Committee on Public Health

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SB 1080 AAC ACCESS TO HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION IN RESTAURANTS.

by

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Good afternoon Senator Harris; Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Rich Rosenthal I am the president of the Max Restaurant Group and Chairman of the Connecticut Restaurant Association. I am here to speak on behalf of the Restaurant Association regarding their position on SB 1080. Although this bill specifically targets chain restaurants; we are in a very competitive marketplace where ultimately we all will have to respond to the same standards or we have the potential to lose market share.

Restaurants are involved in the business of hospitality. Our mission is to respond to our customers wishes regarding the food we serve. As an independent restaurant chain the Max Group's mode of operation is to be creative with specials and to allow that creativity, to an extent, to take place in the kitchen. This probably happens a great deal more in the chef owned restaurants, whose hallmark is creativity. But quite frankly a number of chain restaurants are recreating themselves in the mold of the independent restaurant where you can "have it your way". Whether it is a pasta dish at Macaroni Grill or a pizza at your favorite pizza palace; you're the boss. How many combinations will you have to account for in a Subway Sandwich Shop or a Snack Wrap at McDonalds where you can change the dressing and the way the chicken is prepared. This momentum to give the customer control is a strong and growing trend in our industry

We agree with the concept of an informed customer, after all we have less invested in what it is that the customer chooses and we are driven by whether they enjoy it. Our problem with this legislation is a concern over implementation and practicality. My menus are the single most important marketing vehicle that I produce and the dishes on it evolve with the creativity of the culinary team. To have to seek new laboratory analysis with every minor fluctuation of ingredients would be an incredible burden for all but the largest chains that operate thousands of restaurants and employ scientists alongside their chefs. You have set the number of restaurants that constitute a chain at ten...I am not yet there, maybe some day. However my restaurants operate independently and I don't ever foresee a day that my menus will be "formulated" by scientists instead of chefs.

For lack of a better description restaurants are on a continuum of sophistication. At one end is the chain restaurant where the menus are exact formulas often prepackaged with little variation. As you move further away from this version to the more entrepreneurial there is more variation in preparation, product substitution, availability, and creativity. Your interest is in public health and ours is in remaining viable in the very competitive restaurant business. Healthy lifestyles are created through educating consumers about choice and moderation. The restaurant industry provides consumers with ample choices but in the end it is up to them what and where they choose to dine.

Education is the key and it must start at the earliest ages because without it the meaning of calories, saturated and trans fat, carbohydrates and sodium per serving will mean nothing. Education is critical but that is not the role of restaurants and food stores it is the role of public health and the educational system.