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## **Children Committee**

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**John Bailey Government Relations Director  
American Heart / Stroke Association**

### **H.B. 6525 "An Act Establishing A Childhood Obesity Task Force"**

Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban, and esteemed members of the Children Committee, thank you for allowing me the time to discuss a very serious health crisis confronting the state's most vulnerable.

My name is John Bailey, State Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

The American Heart Association would like to comment on H.B. 6525 "An Act Establishing A Childhood Obesity Task Force."

There is a public health crisis facing the state of Connecticut. It is present wherever we look.

Obesity has gone prime time as an American health issue. It's everywhere: every neighborhood, every mall, every school and every workplace, but public policy is doing little to stem the tide of a crisis. If more is not done the cost to the state's taxpayers will be in the billions of dollars in health care costs, millions of hours of lost productivity and premature death due to health related diseases associated with obesity.

Consider these facts:

- The number of overweight children and adolescents ages 6-16 has nearly tripled since forty years ago.
- More than 10% of children between the ages of 2 and 5 are overweight, up from 7% in 1994
- Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults.
- Today, 65% of all American adults are overweight or obese, If current trends continue that percentage will rise even higher as generation reach adulthood.

As these facts show, obesity is a very serious health issue for our children and the long term impact will be felt by our state if nothing is done to curb the obesity trend. This crisis must be addressed sooner than later. The facts are startling. With nearly a quarter our young people in our state being defined as obese or overweight, it is our strong recommendation that the General Assembly take action and setting up a task force can be a step in the right direction in the battle to fight for our children's health.

In Connecticut, the adult obesity rate is nearly 22 percent with the overweight and obesity rates among adults rising. 3,000 of our friends, family, neighborhoods die each year from obesity-related complications. Even more distressing, these numbers do not reflect overweight and obesity trends for vulnerable populations, including children.

Most recently, the State Department of Education released a report that shed light on just how dire the state's childhood obesity crisis is in our schools. More than a quarter of our high school students are either obese or overweight. Males, Hispanics and African American's, are being recorded at the very troubling rate, 30% being obese or overweight.

Among children today, obesity is causing a broad range of health problems that previously weren't seen until adulthood.

Type 2 diabetes, which was once referred to as "adult onset" diabetes, is largely preventable with proper diet and physical activity. Until recently, most newly diagnosed cases of diabetes in children were for Type 1, which is mainly genetic in origin.

But today, as many as 45 percent of newly diagnosed diabetes cases in children are Type 2. At least 65 percent of people with diabetes die of some form of heart disease or stroke when the disease is left untreated.

Heart and cardiovascular health consequences of being overweight or obese is a major *preventable* cause of heart disease. Obesity has recently overtaken smoking as the leading cause of premature heart attack. A recent study found that children ages 7 to 13 who are overweight are at an increased risk of developing heart disease beginning at age 25. Teens who are obese and who have high triglyceride levels have arteries similar to those of 45-year-olds.

There are also psychological effects.

Obese children are more prone to low self-esteem, negative body image and depression.

And excess weight at young ages has been linked to higher and earlier death rates in adulthood.

Perhaps one of the most sobering statements regarding the severity of the childhood obesity epidemic came from former U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona, who characterized the threat as follows:

"Because of the increasing rates of obesity, unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity, we may see the first generation that will be less healthy and have a shorter life expectancy than their parents."

The General Assembly must begin to develop realistic and far reaching public policy options to address a crisis that is putting our children in serious risk. Creating the Childhood Obesity Task Force and truly acting on its recommendations is an important first step.

The American Heart Association produced a report entitled "Understanding Childhood Obesity" that clearly lays out the current situation facing our children, outlines steps that can be taken to address this health epidemic, and examines the consequence if we do nothing to help our children.

I have submitted copies of this report to the clerk, and I hope you will take the time to review the material; The report is only 14 pages long.

Obesity can be stopped. And it doesn't take high-tech treatments or cutting-edge medications. Really, the solution begins and ends with the simple choices we make every day.

The AHA is committed to fighting childhood obesity and has established an aggressive health impact goal for the year 2020: to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20%, while reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and Stroke by 20% by the year 2020.

To measure the success of the 2020 impact goal, American Heart Association has created health impact measures for children over age two in the areas of: smoking, Body Mass Index (BMI), physical activity, diet score, total cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar.

The American Heart Association calls upon this committee to support HB 6525 and give our children a chance to live healthy life, risk free of obesity related life threatening diseases.