



March 3, 2015

The Honorable Dante Bartolomeo, Co-Chair
The Honorable Diana Urban, Co-Chair
Committee on Children
The Connecticut General Assembly

RE: HB 6898 An Act Concerning Marketing of Unhealthy Foods in Schools

Dear Chairwomen Bartolomeo and Urban and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding **HB 6898**.

The Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity conducts research to inform policy makers and the public on ways to maximize the impact of policy on public health. We have been studying the issue of food marketing to children and teens for the past seven years, and have published extensively on the subject. We would like to present some evidence-based information on the extent of marketing to children in schools, and its impact. Our Director of Marketing, Jennifer Harris, PhD, is a nationally-recognized expert in this field, and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you on this issue.

Children in the U.S. today are consuming too many calories from foods and beverages high in sugar and saturated fat, which is putting them at risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and cancer. Despite promises by food companies to market healthier choices to children younger than age 12, they continue to target children, as well as adolescents, with marketing for products that contribute to these diet-related diseases. They spend approximately \$1.8 billion every year to target youth with ads for fast food, sugary drinks, and candy, among other products.

Marketing in schools is a common tool used by food and beverage companies to encourage children to consume their brands, and to recruit lifelong loyal customers. In 2009, the companies spent \$149 million (8% of total youth-targeted expenditures) on in-school marketing. Ninety percent were for carbonated and other sugary beverages, followed by fast food. Marketing for snack foods, candy, baked goods, and dairy products—all high in sugar, calories, and fat—was also included. These products often do not meet the minimum nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, as required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

Among the many concerns about marketing in schools are:

- Students are a “captive” audience, and as such, are exposed to messages many times over the approximately 200 days per year they are in school. Studies show that continuous exposure to brand logos directly increases long-term preferences for those brands¹ and leads to increased intake and poor diet over time.²

¹ Harris JL, Brownell KD, Bargh JA. The food marketing defense model: integrating psychological research to protect youth and inform public policy. *Soc Issues Policy Rev.* 2009;3(1):211-271.

² Schwartz, MB, Ustjanauskas A. "Food marketing to youth: Current threats and opportunities." *Childhood Obesity (Formerly Obesity and Weight Management)* 2012;8(2): 85-88.

- Marketing in schools is pervasive. It appears on and in:
 - vending machines
 - food coupons for student incentives, including in 2/3 of elementary schools, (e.g. Pizza Hut's Book-It Program)
 - reward programs for purchases (e.g., General Mills' Box Tops for Education; My Coke Rewards)
 - curricular materials
 - logos on donated school equipment such as scoreboards, uniforms, and beverage coolers (e.g. Coca Cola or Pepsi on scoreboards)
 - in-school promotions and fundraisers (e.g. Hershey's candy)
 - company mascots visiting elementary schools to teach about healthy eating (e.g. Ronald McDonald)
 - display ads on Internet search engines and educational websites
 - buses
- School-based marketing occurs often without parents being aware of it, or having the ability to limit it.
- Lessons in good nutrition are undermined when the products featured in halls, cafeterias, vending machines and athletic fields do not meet good nutritional standards.

Across all demographic groups, two-thirds of parents support regulations which would limit the advertising and sponsorships of these unhealthy foods and beverages. Most school officials also support these regulations.³

Schools should be free of advertising for unhealthy products so that our children are learning in environments that promote strong bodies as well as minds.

Thank you again for allowing me to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,



Roberta R. Friedman, ScM
Director of Public Policy

³ Harris, JL., and Fox T. "Food and Beverage Marketing in Schools: Putting Student Health at the Head of the Class." *JAMA pediatrics* 2014;168, no. 3: 206-208.