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**Public Health Committee  
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**Comments from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network on Proposed H.B. No. 5526 AN ACT EXPANDING HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES ON STATE PROPERTY AND IN STATE-SUPPORTED INSTITUTIONS.**

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) is pleased to provide comments on Proposed H.B. No. 5526 An Act Expanding Healthy Food Choices On State Property And In State-Supported Institutions. ACS CAN is the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society that supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN's advocacy work on obesity, nutrition, and physical activity is focused on creating healthy social and physical environments and providing consumers with clear, useful information that support making healthy lifestyle choices.

For the majority of Americans who do not use tobacco, the most important behaviors to reduce cancer risk are weight control, dietary choices, and physical activity. Overweight and obesity are clearly associated with an increased risk of cancers of the breast in postmenopausal women, colorectal, endometrium, kidney, adenocarcinoma of the esophagus, and pancreas and may be associated with many other cancers. In its *Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention*, the Society recognizes the importance of both individual choice and community action to modify these behaviors in order to successfully reduce the nearly one-third of cancer deaths attributable to poor diet, physical inactivity, and overweight and obesity.

Poor nutrition and the consumption of high-calorie foods and beverages are major contributors to excess weight and increase the risk of cancer. Despite the evidence linking overweight and obesity, poor nutrition, and physical inactivity to increased cancer risk, the majority of Americans are not meeting recommended nutrition and physical activity targets. Social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors strongly influence individual choices about diet and physical activity. Reversing obesity trends and reducing the associated cancer risk will require a broad range of strategies that include policy and environmental changes that make it easier for individuals to regularly make healthy diet and physical activity choices.

Currently, 36 percent of adults<sup>1</sup> and 17 percent of youth (ages 2-19)<sup>2</sup> are obese. When overweight individuals are included, 69 percent of adults and 32 percent of youth are either overweight or obese. Adult obesity more than doubled between 1976-1980 and 1999-2000, but since has increased only slightly among men. Between the early 1970s and the early 2000s, youth obesity more than tripled, but similar to adult obesity, has

leveled off in the last decade except for a small increase among boys. Although obesity rates are no longer increasing dramatically, they are still high, and existing levels of obesity are causing a significant burden of chronic disease. Large racial, ethnic, and geographic disparities in obesity rates exist across all age groups.

In Connecticut, more than half of the state's population is overweight and obese, at a cost of \$856 million, according to the 2013 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey.<sup>3</sup>

HB 5526 seeks to address this dangerous and growing epidemic by expanding healthy food choices on state property and in state-supported institutions through the establishment of minimum nutrition and procurement standards.

Our comments and specific recommendations for improving the bill are detailed below.

We agree with the intent that the State of Connecticut should establish nutrition standards and food procurement policies for state agencies. Legislation should require the development of science-based guidelines based on the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans and current science.<sup>4</sup> Legislation should include a provision that it will be reviewed periodically and updated as needed to stay current with the latest research or updated dietary guidelines. Applying nutrition standards to improve the availability and quality of healthy foods and beverages available on state government property helps to ensure that the State of Connecticut is contributing to the improved health of state employees and residents that utilize state services.

Additionally, we recommend the bill also focus on ensuring education, acceptance, regional food options and an assessment tool.

### **Food and Beverage Service Provided by the State**

The policy must apply to all foods and beverages purchased by state, county or city agencies for their employees and guests at meetings. It must apply to on-site vendors, as well as foods and beverages served and sold to all persons served by departments or agencies.

Exemptions are allowed only for those circumstances where the individuals consuming the food have specific dietary needs, for example, all first responders, or a state patrol or police training academy where trainees are spending an unusual amount of time doing fitness training and may have higher caloric and different nutritional needs than the average person.

The requirements may not be averaged over the course of a week or a longer time period.

### **Nutrition Promotion**

It will be critical for to ensure that effective promotion and marketing strategies are integrated into efforts. For example, it is not enough to update materials and databases for menu planning and procurement for food service staff. Marketing and promotion are critical to ensuring that menus are developed and meals are prepared and promoted in

ways that are engaging and appealing. We urge that a strong marketing and promotion component in training and technical assistance efforts be included.

### **Vending Machine Procurement**

Each vending machine must display the total calorie content for each item as sold, and labeling should be consistent with federal law for calorie labeling of vending machines once in effect; a vending machine policy must apply to all fruits and beverages in all vending machines;

### **Cultural Preferences**

Cultural preferences are a cardinal element in helping people to eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and leaner protein foods. Offering more healthy options is the first step; getting people to select and consume healthier meals is the second. It will be essential to assist in identifying and using culturally appropriate fruits, vegetables, and other foods in menus. We encourage consideration of the cultural food preferences of people, which could be one effective strategy to help ensure they find tasty, attractive, and acceptable options.

### **Regional Procurement**

Several studies have shown that implementing regional procurement programs can increase participation, consumption of fruits and vegetables, acceptance of meals, and may even bring in additional revenue. We recommend local education agencies be provided with training and technical assistance on how to purchase locally grown products as a strategy to help promote fruit and vegetable intake and encourage people to accept them. We also encourage a review of best practices for seasonal procurement is conducted to help food service operations offer healthier meals and improve acceptance.

### **Institutional Feeding**

The policy must apply to all state, county or city agencies that maintain legal custody of individuals.

The policy must apply to on-site vendors, as well as foods and beverages served to all persons by departments or agencies for persons for residents at their institutions, those in their direct custody, or who are served through feeding programs.

Exemptions may be allowed for circumstances where the individuals or groups consuming the food have specific dietary needs as a result of a medical condition or prescribed feeding plan.

The requirements may not be averaged over the course of a week or a longer time period.

### **Assessment**

Any procurement policy should include the following:

A provision that it will be reviewed periodically and updated as needed to stay current with the latest research or updated dietary guidelines;

A provision that indicates the resulting contract documents contain provisions for accurate and timely financial reports from vendors, periodic reviews or audits of financial records related to the agreement and specific breach of contract and enforcement provisions;

Finally, we recognize that there will be challenges to coordination and implementation, and that such changes have the potential to affect participation. To this end, we encourage the inclusion of an assessment tool to understand food service practices within state agencies and departments as well as their needs. Additional assessment is needed to monitor participation and acceptance of meals, snacks and beverages upon implementation. Participation and acceptance go hand-in-hand with effective menu planning and marketing and promotion.

Since approximately two in three adults are overweight or obese, and this prevalence has increased significantly from just three or four decades ago, policy and environmental changes are gravely needed to ensure healthier food and beverage options are more readily available and healthier choices are easier to make especially in schools where children spend a large portion of their time, as well as in the workplace, where adults spend a large portion of theirs.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

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<sup>1</sup> Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Ogden CL. Prevalence of Obesity and Trends in the Distribution of Body Mass Among US Adults, 1999-2010. JAMA

2012; 307(5): published online ahead of print.

<sup>2</sup> Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Flegal KM. Prevalence of Obesity and Trends in Body Mass Index Among US Children and Adolescents, 1999-2010. JAMA

2012; 307(5): published online ahead of print.

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. [http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hisr/pdf/brfss2012\\_ct\\_report.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hisr/pdf/brfss2012_ct_report.pdf) p.18

<sup>4</sup> U.S. General Services Administration. Concessions and Cafeterias: Healthy Food in the Federal Workplace. <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104429>.