



**Public Health Committee
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House Bill 5526, An Act Expanding Healthy Food Choices on State Property and in State Supported Institution

I would like to thank Chairwoman Gerratana and Chairman Ritter and the Committee for providing me with the opportunity to comment on House Bill 5526, An Act Expanding Healthy Food Choices on State Property and in State Supported Institution.

The American Heart Association believes State food vending and concession policies can be designed to make healthier food more available, affordable, and appealing to consumers. This policy is not designed to restrict choice but allow for more selections, including healthy choices. Establishing nutrition standards for foods served and sold in state agencies gives the people working for and visiting government agencies the opportunity to pick healthier options and take control of what they choose to eat. Currently, it can be very difficult for employees and visitors to make healthier choices. A national survey of vending machine options on state and local government property found that 80% of vended food items were fried chips, candy, and sweet baked goods, only 5% of vended food items were healthy, and close to 60% of beverages were soda and other sugary drinks.ⁱ The aim of this policy is to address a very serious and costly health issue that is impacting the state: obesity.

Connecticut is facing an obesity crisis that affects citizens of all ages. In the 2013 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey found that 36.7% of adults were classified as overweight (defined as a body mass index between 25.0-29.9) and 25.6% were classified as obese (defined as a BMI of 30.0 or above).ⁱⁱ More than half of the state's population is overweight and obese. These numbers cannot be viewed in a vacuum. The prevalence of overweight and obese residence is cause for concern both in terms of the impact on the health of a large segment of our population and economic cost associated with this health crisis.

In one year, obesity-related health problems in Connecticut added \$856 million in adult medical expenditures, including \$665 million in Medicaid and Medicare costs.ⁱⁱⁱ Excess weight is often associated with chronic diseases, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.^{iv v} Adopting healthy lifestyle habits, such as eating healthier foods, can help with maintaining a healthy body weight and reducing the risk of developing chronic diseases. Food procurement policies, as set out in HB. 5526, can be designed to make healthier food more accessible and pleasing to the customer.

Dietary behaviors are influenced by a number of factors including the food environment. Governments can make healthier food and beverage options the easy choice.^{vi} The State of Connecticut can be a critical player by adopting nutrition standards for foods and beverages served in its agency buildings that

are consistent with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Doing so will contribute to the improved health of state employees and Connecticut residents that utilize the state services.^{vii}

Making healthy options available on state-owned properties demonstrates the government's commitment to addressing the obesity crisis and has the potential to influence healthy eating behaviors of tens of thousands of people including government employees, visitors to public buildings and property, and program participants. Serving and selling unhealthy food without making sure healthy options are available is inconsistent with State initiatives to improve the health of its population and undermines the Department of Public Health's mission. By pursuing this policy the State can become an active driver of demand for and access to healthier foods, help shape social norms, and influence the practices and formulations of food companies.

Throughout the country there are examples of states, counties, and local municipalities' implementing food policies that ensure healthier choices in their concessions and in vending operations. Governments that have implemented policies to increase the number of healthy food options to government employees and the public have experienced positive results and have taken measures to improve and continue their policies. The State of Tennessee strengthened its nutrition standards for healthy vending in October 2013.^{viii} Last September, the State of California passed legislation to eliminate the sunset on its healthy vending law.

Many of these initiatives have been funded through the CDC's Community Transformation Grants and most recently the Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion FY 2014 Funding Awards, which Connecticut was one of the awardees. The CDC intends awardee to coordinate prevention activities to address the reduction of the prevalence of obesity.^{ix}

In 2011, the County of Los Angeles ("County") Board of Supervisors adopted Healthy Food Promotion in Los Angeles County Food Service Contracts, a motion aimed at County departmental food procurement policies and practices as they relate to nutrition. The motion established a process for the County's Department of Public Health to develop nutrition standards and/or healthy food procurement practices in new and renewing Requests for Proposals (RFP) for food service and vending contracts across County departments.^x

A healthy vending pilot was conducted in three Delaware state agency buildings from October 2011 through April 2012. During the pilot, healthy selections were increased to 75% of food or beverage selections. The healthy vending pilot successfully shifted purchasing away from unhealthy beverages as compared to 2011 sales. In one location, sales of unhealthy beverages dropped from 75% of the units sold to 38%, while the overall units sold during those months increased.^{xi}

In February 2012, the Chicago Parks District implemented 100% healthier products in all park vending machines. During a 15 month evaluation, average monthly vending machine sales increased from \$84 to \$371 per machine, higher than the national pre-machine averages for similar locations. In addition, 88% of park visitors were satisfied with the healthier options. The leading complaint among park visitors was that the products were not healthy enough.

It is recommended that the State of Connecticut adopt a food procurement policy for state agencies establishing nutrition standards similar to those found in U.S. General Services Administration's (GSA) *Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations*.^{xii} Applying nutrition standards to improve the availability of healthy foods and beverages served and sold on government property helps to ensure that the State of Connecticut is leading by example and is not contradicting state and local work in obesity and chronic disease prevention.

To effectively coordinate this initiative to offer healthier choices that follow the GSA guidelines, a DPH staff member or graduate student intern should interview representatives from each agency department who oversees food procurement policy to learn more about their food service practices and discuss their specific departmental needs in order to effectively operate a particular food venue. These meetings should be designed to lead to a greater understanding of the complex food services landscape that comprises the State's agency food environment. For example, the agencies sell or distribute food and beverages to different populations in a variety of settings, such as older adults at community centers or parks, children in summer and afterschool programs, and state employees in worksite cafeterias.

After the initial interview and assessment, each agency's procurement procedures for food service and vending contracting will be more well-defined. This will help to prepare staff at DPH to provide technical support to each agency, including development of nutrition standards for each food service RFP, and development of quality improvement plans, provision of social marketing materials and training, and troubleshooting of implementation barriers.

Being sensitive to the dietary regulations and demands to state intuitions and their unique populations, the American Heart Association is inclined to support Healthy Food Choice legislation that is targeted to vending and concession operations.

We look forward to working with the sponsor of House Bill 5526 and the members of the Committee to make this legislation more effective and ensure the implementation process is smooth and reduces technical hurdles in the effort to position the State of Connecticut as a leader in offering healthy choices in its vending and concession operations.

Thank you,



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ⁱ <http://cspinet.org/vendingcontradictions.pdf>

ⁱⁱ 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 p.18

ⁱⁱⁱ Finkelstein, EA, et al. (2004). State-level estimates of annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity. *Obesity Research* 12:18-24. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1038/oby.2004.4/epdf>

^{iv} Connecticut Department of Public Health. April, 2014. Live Healthy Connecticut, A Coordinated Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Plan. Hartford, CT: Connecticut Department of Public Health http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hems/chronic_dis/connecticut_chronic_disease_plan_april_2014.pdf p.9

^v U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. 7th Edition, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010. <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/dietaryguidelines/>

^{vi} Institute of Medicine. 2012. Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3648752/pdf/708.pdf>

^{vii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Improving the Food Environment Through Nutrition Standards: A Guide for Government Procurement. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention. February 2011 http://www.cdc.gov/salt/pdfs/DHDSP_Procurement_Guide.pdf

^{viii} <http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/Examples%20of%20National,%20State%20and%20Local%20Food%20Procurement%20Policies.pdf>

^{ix} <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/about/2014-foaawards.htm>

^x http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chronic/docs/20131227_CTG_Summary.pdf

^{xi} J. Weber, personal communication, March 26, 2013 http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/revenue_fact_sheet.pdf

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

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