



Testimony in support of Senate Bill 296:
An Act Concerning the Provision of Healthy Food in Vending Machines Operated on State
Property and Recommendations of the Child Obesity Task Force

Connecticut General Assembly Joint Public Health Committee Hearing

March 14, 2016

Submitted by Colin Schwartz, Center for Science in the Public Interest

Dear Chairwoman Gerratana, Chairman Ritter, and the Committee:

I thank Chairwoman Gerratana, Chairman Ritter, and the Committee for providing me with the opportunity to comment on SB 296 *An Act Concerning the Provision of Healthy Food in Vending Machines Operated on State Property and Recommendations of the Child Obesity Task Force*, on behalf of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). CSPI is a nonprofit health-advocacy organization that specializes in food and nutrition. CSPI strongly supports eliminating unhealthy food marketing in Connecticut schools and studying the content of vending machines on state property. We are pleased that the Joint Public Health Committee is addressing these important issues.

Given the high rates of childhood obesity, diet- and obesity-related diseases like diabetes, and children's poor diets, it does not make sense to advertise unhealthy food to children, especially in schools. Childhood obesity has more than tripled in children and adolescents in the past 30 years. Currently, more than one-third of children and adolescents are overweight or obese, putting their health at risk.

Companies that sell unhealthy food and beverages spend millions on advertising and marketing to children because they know it works. According to the National Academies' Institute of Medicine, food marketing influences children's attitudes, food choices, diets, and health. According to the Federal Trade Commission, companies spend \$150 million annually marketing foods and beverages in elementary, middle, and high schools. The majority of the marketed products are of poor nutritional quality. Common in-school food marketing approaches include direct advertising on school property and facilities, such as scoreboards, posters, or bus ads, incentive programs, sponsorships, scholarships, free samples and coupon giveaways, and branded fundraising programs.

Many schools across the country have switched to healthier marketing and fundraising alternatives without losing revenue. Connecticut schools have also been working hard to make school meals more wholesome and nutritious, and offer healthier snack options sold outside the school meal program. Yet despite significant improvements to foods served in schools, the

marketing of unhealthy foods in schools, which undermines this progress, has not been addressed. If companies cannot sell unhealthy foods in school, they should not market them either.

Further, we strongly support studying the contents of vending machines operated on state property. Vended offerings are often of poor nutritional value: high in calories, fats, and added sugars and low in nutritional quality.

Connecticut is working on obesity prevention, but in order to walk-the-walk, the state also should provide healthy options for the 324,600 full- and part-time State and local employees and countless others visiting public property.

Most people want healthier snack options. According to a study by the Snack Food Association, about 74% of people are trying to eat healthier, with about 65% eating specific foods to lose weight. Market growth of healthier snacks is outpacing growth in sales of traditional snacks by nearly four to one. Yet a national study found that just 5% of food options from vending machines on state and local property are healthy.

Connecticut was one of the first states to establish nutrition standards for food and beverages sold through vending machines in schools (sections 10-215b-1 and 10-215b-23 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies). It also should ensure state employees and visitors to public properties, including children, have access to healthier options.

Healthy vending is a low-cost policy approach for Connecticut to help reduce diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and other costly chronic diseases and save health care dollars through Medicaid and state employee health insurance. Implementing nutrition standards for vending machines can be cost neutral or even increase revenue for vendors. And strategies like competitive pricing, prominent placement, promotion, or education can further help to encourage healthy choices and prevent reductions in revenue.

Thank you for addressing these important health issues affecting Connecticut.

Thank you,

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