April 11, 2017

Connecticut General Assembly – Appropriations Committee

RE: HB 7314 A Tax on Certain Sweetened Beverages

Dear Senators Fonfara and Scott, Representatives Rojas and Davis, and members of the Finance Committee,

As the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI) and a Registered Dental Hygienist, I am asking you to support HB 7314, A Tax on Certain Sweetened Beverages.

There is solid scientific evidence that the consumption of sugary drinks contributes to a number of serious, chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. They also contribute significantly to another serious, chronic disease: dental decay.¹ The sugar in soda, fruit drinks, sports drinks, sweet teas, energy drinks and sweetened waters, combines with bacteria to form acid, which attacks the teeth and erodes the enamel. Six-year-old children have an 83% chance of cavities if they drank sugary drinks during infancy.² Regular drinking of sugary beverages increases the risk of tooth decay by 31% in adults.³ When cavities and decay become severe, that pain interferes with daily living, preventing people from going to school or work.⁴

A penny-per-ounce excise tax on sugary drinks in Connecticut would reduce consumption, and raise over $145M in 2018. It would also make our state the U.S. leader, setting an example for other states to follow, so that nationally we can begin to make a dent in the high rates of dental disease and other serious illnesses which are related to sugary drink consumption.

COHI recommends the following amendment to the language in section (h) (1) to include oral health in the targets for the revenue:

... Moneys in the account shall be expended by (A) the Commissioner of Early Childhood for the purposes of the Care 4 Kids program, (B) the Commissioner of Public Health for public education and outreach efforts regarding obesity, childhood obesity, heart disease and diabetes, and oral disease......(2) Beginning October 1, 2018, the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at The University of Connecticut shall evaluate, in conjunction with the Commissioners of Early Childhood, Public Health and Revenue Services, the impact of the tax imposed under subsection (b) of this section on rates of obesity, childhood obesity, heart disease and diabetes, and oral disease in the state....

Let’s not forget that if you do not have oral health, you do not have overall physical health. If you cannot eat, drink, talk or even smile, it’s hard to fully participate in family, work and play.

Thank you for your time and commitment to this issue. If I can be of any assistance, please contact me at 860-246-2644 ext. 203 or at maryb@ctoralhealth.org.

Sincerely,

Mary Moran Boudreau
Executive Director

¹ http://www.jodjournal.com/article/S0300-5712(14)00119-5/abstract
⁴ See http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cavities/basics/complications/con-20030076