February 6, 2019

Honorable Liz Linehan, Co-Chair
Honorable Mary Daugherty Abrams, Co-Chair
Committee on Children
State Capitol Building, Room O11
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: H.B. 7006

Dear Chair Linehan and Chair Abrams,

On behalf of the International Dairy Foods Association, I am writing to express serious concerns regarding H.B. 7006 as introduced.

The International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA), Washington, D.C., represents the nation’s dairy manufacturing and marketing industry, which supports nearly 3 million jobs that generate more than $161 billion in wages and has an overall economic impact of more than $628 billion. In Connecticut, the dairy products industry employs nearly 13,000 residents and has an overall economic impact of $2.73 billion. IDFA members range from multinational organizations to single-plant companies. Together they represent approximately 90 percent of the milk, cultured products, cheese, ice cream and frozen desserts produced and marketed in the United States and sold throughout the world. The diverse membership includes numerous food retailers, suppliers, cooperatives and companies that offer a wide variety of nutritional dairy products and dairy-derived ingredients.

H.B. 7006 as introduced would limit the types of beverages that Connecticut restaurants could include on children’s menus. If enacted, flavored milk could no longer be listed which would likely lead to decreased milk consumption by children. It is our understanding that H.B. 7006’s sponsors are seeking to decrease intake of sugar by children. We believe that flavored milk should be allowed as a children’s menu option because it is nutrient dense and does not contribute significant amounts of added sugar to the diet.

Flavored and sweetened dairy products, such as flavored milk, are an important part of encouraging adequate intake of dairy products, which are under-consumed by most Americans. Flavored milk is nutrient dense and provides significant nutritional benefits. The moderate levels of added sugar in fluid milk increases palatability, thereby encouraging children to drink more of this nutrient-dense food. Flavored milk contains the same nutrients as unflavored milk,
but with some added sweetener ingredients that can provide a flavor that some children prefer. Flavored milks, like all cow’s milk, are a source of 11 essential nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D and potassium.

Despite the nutritional benefits, fluid milk product consumption has been declining steadily over the past three decades with per capita consumption dropping by 74 pounds from the level of 223 pounds in 1987 to its lowest level of 149 pounds in 2017.1 Americans should be encouraged to consume more milk and dairy products, including flavored milk, to meet their nutrient needs. Any steps that could further reduce consumer options for dairy products should be carefully considered.

USDA’s school meal programs provide a recent example of how changes that are meant to improve food choices and nutrient intakes can have unfortunate unintended consequences. Studies have been conducted to assess the impact of the withdrawal of flavored, low fat milk from schools. One study found that removing flavored milk on one or all days of the week resulted in a 26% reduction in sales of milk, a 37% reduction in consumption, and an 11% increase in milk discarded as waste.2 The waste of milk was confirmed in a more recent study (2017) that found reduced consumption of milk also resulted in increased food waste for some school food service programs.3 Flavored milk is a nutrient dense choice that can help children consume nutrients of public health concern in the school meal programs. More broadly, strategies that help consumers increase intakes of nutrient dense foods, such as low-fat dairy foods, should be encouraged.

In summary, flavored milk is an important way that many people prefer and choose to consume dairy products. If flavored milk become less available, consumers may decrease consumption of these products or switch to other non-dairy foods or beverages. The unintended consequence may further decrease consumption of already under-consumed nutrients and food groups.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this legislation.

Sincerely,

J. David Carlin
Senior Vice President, Legislative Affairs & Economic Policy