



## State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

STATE CAPITOL

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

### Task Force on Childhood Obesity

#### MINUTES

Thursday, October 10, 2013

**Co-chairs:** Rep. Diana Urban and Sen. Dante Bartolomeo

**Attended by:** Sen. Art Linares, Rep. Whit Betts, Rep. Christie Carpino, Susan Maffe (Meriden Public Schools), Carol Hazen for Roberta Friedman (Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, Yale University), Brittany Silvestrini (Yale Stress Center and Bright Bodies Program), Alicia Andrews (United Way of Western Connecticut), Dr. Jean Mee (SDE), Marcia Maillard (DPH); Sylvia Gafford-Alexander (DSS); Robin Masheb (Yale School of Medicine and CTVA); Lucy Nolan (End Hunger CT!); and Dr. Fredericka Wolman (DCF)

**Absent Members:** Christine Parker, Roberta R. Friedman

The meeting was called to order at 1:07 pm.

Rep. Urban and Sen. Bartolomeo welcomed everyone. Rep. Urban announced that future meetings would last approximately 75 minutes and that the task force may break into smaller groups during those meetings.

Rep. Urban explained that the goal of the task force is to develop a comprehensive policy about childhood obesity and a plan for the state to address it. She noted that obesity is one of the headline indicators on the Children's RBA Report Card and the task force information will be used in the report card to advise policy.

Sen. Bartolomeo stated that the task force members are all volunteers recruited for their knowledge in the area of childhood obesity. She noted that in a little more than one generation, obesity tripled among preschoolers and quadrupled among children aged 6-11. Obesity is also a contributing factor to many major chronic illnesses in the U.S.

Sen. Linares noted that 50% of obese children stay obese in adulthood. He expressed that he wants the task force to figure out how to encourage children to be more active both in and out of school and he wants to eliminate childhood obesity in the state. (Sen. Linares later suggested a more conservative task force goal of 25% reduction in childhood obesity.)

Rep. Betts expressed his concern about child nutrition and physical activity issues. He believes legislation could be helpful, but also believes that common sense and rational discussion can also be effective means of dealing with these issues. He looks forward to formulating solid recommendations to address these issues.

Rep. Carpino thanked the task force members for their participation and noted that she has observed the prevalence of childhood obesity in her children's school.

During the general discussion, the following points were made:

Rep. Urban: Collecting data on childhood obesity is challenging since there are no standard BMIs/weights for children as a whole, but rather, different ones depending on age. She also asked task force members for data rich indicator suggestions to establish a baseline for comparison.

Alecia Andrews: The key to addressing childhood obesity is for families to work with pediatricians and have doctors monitor weight.

Dr. Wolman: The American Academy of Pediatrics has established its own task force that is looking at childhood obesity and also formulating nutrition guides and tools to address childhood obesity.

Marcia Maillard: BMI is often mentioned in childhood obesity discussions, but it is not necessarily a reliable indicator.

Lucy Nolan: She noted the importance of establishing a baseline and mentioned that parents must fill out blue health forms for children entering 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The data on those forms may be more useful.

Rep. Urban: She will ask the CT Data Collaborative for relevant childhood obesity data.

Dr. Mee: Reliable data is not necessarily about individual health and wellness, but issues such as daily physical education for students and other practices that either contribute to or remediate childhood obesity.

Sylvia Gafford-Alexander: Ethnic and cultural differences, as well as access to food also play a part in childhood obesity.

Rep. Urban: "Food deserts" and "food swamps" combined contribute to the problem, too. She asked the task force what its goal should be (e.g., no childhood obesity in CT?) She also asked if there are any programs aimed at addressing childhood obesity that are currently working.

Dr. Wolman and Alecia Andrews both mentioned Maine's "5-2-1-0" program as a model to look at for improving community nutrition.

Sylvia Gafford-Alexander: Food Stamps have helped reduce food insecurity and, in turn, obesity.

Dr. Wolman: Concerned about “no obesity” goal; obesity may be an unavoidable aspect of some health conditions. She worries about stigmatizing obesity.

Sen. Linares: It is important to the task force to have goals, but more conservative ones, such as a 25% reduction in obesity, may be more attainable.

Carol Hazan: Concerned about focusing too much on personal responsibility. She noted it is also important to change the food environment and social norms surrounding food.

Marcia Maillard: Creating a healthy environment needs to happen in the community, not just the schools. The CDC tracks data on food access i.e. where healthy food is not available and provides the data to DPH.

Susan Maffe: New federal healthy food standards are going to be implemented in schools in the near future.

Continued member discussion and debate on the role of individual responsibility versus a healthy eating environment led to final agreement that the task force’s goal would be “to promote a healthy eating environment as well as habits and increase opportunities for physical activity while turning the curve on childhood obesity.”

Sen. Bartolomeo noted that the group only discussed one of the tasks outlined in the enabling legislation. She encouraged members, before the next meeting, to look at the other tasks and consider which subcommittees they wish to join.

Rep. Urban and Sen. Bartolomeo thanked everyone for coming and announced the next meeting would be in approximately one month. Everyone will be sent email notices with suggested meeting times.

The meeting adjourned at 2:37 pm.