



**State of Connecticut**  
**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**  
STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**Task Force on Childhood Obesity**

MINUTES

December 19, 2013

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

**Attendance:** Sen. Dante Bartolomeo, Rep. Diana Urban, Sen. Art Linares, Rep. Whit Betts, Dr. Fredericka Wolman, Dr. Jean Mee, Christine Parker, Roberta Friedman, Judy Omphroy, Brittany Lee Silvestrini, Dr. Robin Masheb, Marcia Maillard, Lucy Nolan

The meeting was convened at 1:05 pm.

Sen. Bartolomeo called the meeting to order and asked co-chair if she had any comments.

Rep. Urban stated a recent study showed that today's children are significantly slower in running than previous generations due to rise in obesity. This highlights the importance of our work.

Sen. Bartolomeo introduced Dr. Sally Wong, Associate Science and Medicine Advisor from the American Heart Association National Center in Washington, DC for a presentation.

Dr. Wong stated she works with the American Heart Association (AHA) Voices for Healthy Kids – a collaboration with the AHA and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. She is also an Assistant Professor for City University in the School of Public Health. Growth charts are heavily relied on to define childhood obesity: Children in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile (or greater) are obese; and children between the 85<sup>th</sup> – 95<sup>th</sup> percentile are viewed as at risk for obesity and needing intervention. For children ages 2-16, one in three children are of unhealthy weight and one in five are obese. CDC released a report showing 18 states with small decrease in obesity. Connecticut is not one of the states. Viewing 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders, we see higher rates of obesity in ethnic minorities. Result of obesity is not only physical health-related problems but also psychological and emotional impacts. If a child is obese at 12 years old, they have a 75% chance of becoming an obese adult. Another result of childhood obesity is the onset in children of diseases we normally associate with adults such as Type II diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and sleep apnea. Two factors that impact childhood obesity – food access and the marketing of unhealthy food to children. Approximately 29% of low-income families in urban areas are over one mile away from markets with fresh produce. These urban families need healthy food options near them. Studies show that advertising of unhealthy foods

have a greater impact on children of low-income families. The drinks children consume contribute to calories and sugar intake. The number of sweetened beverages consumed per week is roughly equal to the age of the child. One can of soda has approximately 8 to 12 teaspoons (or packets) of sugar. One solution may be taxing sugar sweetened drinks which would lower number of purchases. One study showed that taxing the drinks could reduce childhood obesity by 8-10%.

Members of the task force asked questions during the remainder of the presentation.

- Sen. Bartolomeo asked Dr. Wong for her impression of some studies that show diet sodas and caffeinated beverages as also problematic for children.
- Dr. Wong stated that sports drinks and some vitamin drinks also have calories. Need to look at the totality of what the child drinks. Even whole milk contributes to calories.
- Rep. Urban ask if sugar-free drinks are metabolized similar to sugar.
- Dr. Wong stated that sugar-free drinks can be a good substitute to sugar sweetened drinks but a growing body of evidence shows that artificial sweeteners may increase appetite
- Dr. Wong stated that 41% of schools now prohibit junk food which is a good development. School lunch programs have made a number of changes such as no whole milk, only serving whole juice and reducing portion sizes. These are in alignment with USDA recommendations.
- Regarding physical activity, Dr. Wong stated that safe areas for children to play is a problem for children in general but, in particular, low-income families.
- Sen Bartolomeo stated that Connecticut requires 20 minutes per day of physical activity in schools
- Dr. Wong stated that Voices for Healthy Kids has funds for grants and can help groups by providing scientific information. If we do not reverse childhood obesity now, we may have children who do not outlive us. They have a website called, [preventobesity.net](http://preventobesity.net) sharing all the latest research on obesity and creates a forum for leaders on childhood obesity. Can also find them at [voicesforhealthykids.org](http://voicesforhealthykids.org)
- Dr. Masheb asked if there is a standard definition for sugar sweetened beverages
- Dr. Wong stated they are working with other advocates and hope to have something in early 2014
- Sen. Linares asked if Dr. Wong had a list of what is a good, healthy menu.
- Dr. Wong stated that she can send some sample day menus for children across the age spectrum
- Roberta Friedman stated that the USDA has a great tool called, My Plate. Also, the public health community has come up with a definition: Any beverage with added caloric sweetener. They do not include 100% fruit juice
- Rep. Urban stated she grew up on a dairy farm and is curious whether it is the calories in whole milk that is a concern
- Dr. Wong stated it is the calories and fat content of whole milk. For example, whole milk is 150 calories and skim milk is 90 calories
- Lucy Nolan stated that if we just talk about calories in, calories out it sounds easy. There are many marketing and psychological issues to take into account. Calories alone should be the floor not the ceiling of where we're going

- Sen. Bartolomeo stated that she also grew up on dairy farm. She asked for clarification on milk recommendations
- Dr. Wong stated that children age 2 and under should have whole milk
- Dr. Wolman stated that the recommendation for exercise for ages 6-17 is one hour a day. The benefits are beyond just weight. They include other benefits for overall health such as joint development, and help with depression
- Brittany Silvestrini stated that we need to look beyond calories in and calories out. Where you get your calories is also very important. For example, getting calories from pizza is not the same as from fruits and vegetables
- Judy Omphroy asked if Dr. Wong had the policies used in those 18 states that saw decline in obesity rate
- Dr. Wong will share the reports

Sen. Bartolomeo thanked Dr. Wong for her presentation.

Rep. Urban stated that we have three handouts from Roberta Friedman for our review.

Roberta Friedman stated that the handouts represent nutrition policy recommendations from organizations, such as Institute of Medicine, by topic (early childhood, school and community) based on best practices and science. She stated that she could do the same for physical activity.

Rep. Urban asked if we can identify what states have implemented these policies and stated that we would like to use data in CT Kids RBA Report Card work. Roberta Friedman stated the Trust for America may have this information.

Marcia Maillard stated that the DPH has information that she can provide.

Rep. Urban asked for recommendation for a speaker from the Physical Activity focus group.

Sen. Bartolomeo stated three handouts were supplied by Alecia Andrews and asked if anyone from the Physical Activity group wanted to give an update.

Christine Parker stated the Physical Activity group has met and is looking at community projects. The handouts from Ms. Andrews represent three such projects.

Rep. Urban announced that the next meeting would be on **Thursday, January 23, 2014 at 1:00 PM in Room 2B.**

Meeting adjourned at 2:19 PM.