



GROCERY MANUFACTURERS OF AMERICA
MAKERS OF THE WORLD'S FAVORITE BRANDS OF
FOOD, BEVERAGES, AND CONSUMER PRODUCTS

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February 1, 2005

House Health and Human Services Committee
House of Representatives
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612-1504

Dear Committee Members:

On behalf of the Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA), I am writing to express our opposition to House Bill 2137, scheduled for hearing in the House Health and Human Services Committee on February 2, 2005.

Grocery Manufacturers of America is the world's largest association of food, beverage, and consumer product companies. With U.S. sales of more than \$500 billion, GMA members employ more than 2.5 million workers in all 50 states, including 29 companies with 52 plants and over 11,000 employees in the state of Kansas.

GMA and its member companies share the committee's concern about preventing childhood obesity and encouraging healthy eating habits. We believe, as do many nutrition experts, that solving the obesity problem is about maintaining a healthy lifestyle and achieving the proper energy balance. The rise in obesity is the result of many complex factors affecting eating and activity behaviors and there are no simple solutions.

The lack of a balanced diet coupled with the lack of regular, daily physical activity can lead to many physical and mental conditions – including depression, overweight, heart disease and diabetes.

These conditions emerge because of a complex combination of factors and cannot be solved solely by blaming individuals, any single food, or category of food, or societal trends and events. It is well documented that a person's weight is directly related to the interaction of a wide variety of economic, cultural, social, and genetic factors – and not any single cause.

Restrictions – such as those suggested in House Bill 2137 – for the sake of solving obesity would do nothing to motivate students, parents, or communities to take the steps necessary to improve their overall health. If we are to help students to develop and maintain healthy lifestyles for the long-term, we must first give them the tools and resources necessary to do so. Rather than simply restricting student access to foods or finding fault with business-school partnerships that help fund vital programs, we need a more balanced approach focused on providing sound nutrition information to parents, students and teachers; encouraging and funding more physical education and recreational opportunities; and funding the research we need to determine ways to encourage healthy lifestyle choices.

The American Dietetic Association has stated that the entire diet, rather than specific foods, should be scrutinized. In looking at the total diet, we should identify the amount of excess calories in an individual's diet, rather than labeling or categorizing certain foods as strictly "good" or "bad." Restricting or

prohibiting certain foods will almost certainly not work. In fact, a study published in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association states that overly restrictive diets may lead to enhanced food cravings, overindulgence, eating disorders, or a preoccupation with food and eating.

Restrictions do not educate. It is through education – both nutrition and physical – that we will empower students to adopt a healthy lifestyle that meets their own needs and allows them to enjoy their favorite foods as part of a balanced diet.

Studies have shown that children who participate in physical education programs fare better physically and academically than children who are not physically active. As the National Association for Sport and Physical Education reported, a quality physical education program helps children improve self-esteem and interpersonal skills, gain a sense of belonging through teamwork, handle adversity through winning and losing, learn discipline, improve problem-solving skills, and increase creativity.

However, an alarming number of students have little or no regular, daily physical activity. According to a report issued by the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI), about one in four children do not get any physical education in school. Physical education requirements in our public schools have been declining over the last twenty years. Today, only the State of Illinois has a daily physical education requirement for grades K-12, but it allows schools to be exempted from this requirement. Currently, Kansas bases its physical education standards on the National Standards for Physical Education, yet does not use any physical education assessment. Physical education is mandatory at the elementary and high school levels, yet not at the middle school level. There are no time requirements, except high school students must complete one unit of physical education to graduate.

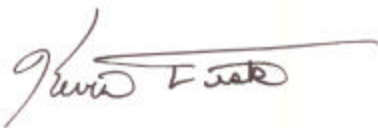
Outside of school, the statistics are equally concerning. According to ILSI, fewer than one in four children get 20 minutes of vigorous activity every day of the week and fewer than one in four get at least half an hour of any type of physical activity every single day.

What is done in the home and in the community is important to combating overweight and obesity. It will take more than a single event to create changes in the ingrained personal, cultural, and nutritional habits at the root of the problem. Successfully addressing the real problems of overweight and obesity will require entire community buy-in. Sustainability of nutrition and physical activity habits is the key.

GMA members and many other companies in the food and beverage industry support a wide variety of nutrition education and physical activity programs designed to help individuals and their communities.

GMA urges the Committee to look for broader, more effective solutions to this situation. GMA requests your "NO" vote on HB 2137.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Fisk". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kevin Fisk
Manager, State Affairs