

February 2, 2005

To: Kansas House Health and Human Services Committee
From: Cindy D'Ercole, Sr. Policy Analyst
Re: House Bill 2137- Healthy food choices in school vending machines

Kansas Action for Children supports enactment of House Bill 2137.

Proper nutrition has an immediate impact on children's ability to learn, as well as on children's oral health and obesity prevention. Research shows that changes in the school food environment can impact food choices and improve the quality of children's diets while at school. Growing awareness of the importance of the obesity epidemic and oral health presents a clear opportunity to require schools to provide healthy options in school vending machines.

Obesity Prevention

There are serious, long-term health consequences of childhood obesity. Childhood and adolescent obesity contributes to asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, low self-esteem, and adult obesity. The prevalence of obesity among adults in Kansas has increased by almost 70 percent since 1992. More than one in five adult Kansans are now obese and almost three in five are at least overweight. Reversing the epidemic of obesity in Kansas will require focusing on obesity prevention in children.

Oral Health

When teeth come in frequent contact with soft drinks and other sugar-containing substances, the risk of decay formation is increased. Oral health is a critical but often overlooked component of overall health and well-being among children and adults. Dental caries (tooth decay) is the most common preventable chronic childhood disease. Pain from untreated dental disease can lead to eating, sleeping, speaking, and learning problems in children and adolescents, which affect a child's social interactions, school achievement, general health, and quality of life. In fact, approximately 51 million school hours per year are lost because of dental-related illness.

Improving the health status of Kansans begins with improving the health of Kansas kids. Both inside and out of the classroom, schools present opportunities for students to learn about good nutrition, physical activity, and their relationship to health. HB 2137 would address part of this equation by focusing on creating a healthy food environment for Kansas kids by requiring healthy food alternatives in vending machines accessible to students. We urge you to support efforts to improve the health of Kansas kids and HB 2137.

Attachment: USDA guidelines

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