

Testimony before the House Health & Human Services Committee

February 2, 2005

Chairman Morrison and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of HB 2137, healthy food choices in vending machines. My name is Teresa Schwab, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas, Inc.

According to the American Dental Association (ADA), American consumption of soft drinks, including carbonated beverages, fruit juice and sports drinks, increased 500 percent in the past 50 years. Americans drank more than 53 gallons of soft drinks per person in 2000, surpassing all other beverages including milk, beer, coffee, and water.

Our mouths are filled with bacteria, and when these bacteria come into contact with sugar or starch, acid is produced that attack teeth. Bacteria are particularly fond of foods containing sugars and carbohydrates. These foods provide bacteria with energy to grow, reproduce, and create enamel eating acid.

Thus, when children have a prolonged exposure to sugary foods and beverages, the risk of early childhood caries (ECC) increases. In fact, according to the 2000 Report of the Surgeon General, dental caries is one of the most common childhood diseases, more than 5 times as common as asthma and 7 times as common as hay fever. Each year, an estimated 51 million school hours are lost because of dental-related illness.

The financial impact of dental disease caused by the consumption of sugary snacks and soft drinks is considerable and especially frustrating because it is totally preventable. For these reasons, Oral Health Kansas supports limiting children's access to the sugary snacks and soft drinks usually available in vending machines and offering children more healthy options.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide you with this testimony today. I would be happy to stand for questions.