

Testimony of Kathy Damron
On behalf of the Girl Scouts Councils serving Kansas Girls
Before the Kansas House Health and Human Services Committee

In Support of House Bill No. 2208
Tuesday, February 15, 2005

The Girl Scout Councils of Kansas strive to inspire girls with the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism, and service so that they may become happy and resourceful citizens. In 2004, there were 41,930 girls, ages 5-17, from across Kansas that benefited from the programs offered through Girl Scouts. There are currently twelve Girl Scout Councils serving Kansas, of which distributed over \$303,000 in financial assistance in 2004 to allow girls opportunities to participate in Girl Scouts.

In addition to the overall mission of the organization, the Girl Scouts is dedicated to providing girls with unlimited opportunities in sports and fitness, and supporting them in eating well. The Girl Scout Research Institute recently completed a report on health and obesity. The report entitled, "Weighing In," showed that obesity rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents, such that obesity is now the most chronic health problem among American children.

The lifestyles, culture, and behavior of children is leading to this obesity epidemic. Most people believe obesity is just being overweight. However, according to the National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases, health professionals define overweight as an excess amount of body weight which includes muscle, bone, fat,

and water, while obesity specifically refers to a long-term (chronic), complex disease in which having too much body fat increases your risk for developing other health problems.

In addition to the physical harm that results from being overweight, research suggests that related social and emotional issues also have an impact on the overall quality of life. Overweight individuals, namely young females, struggle with self-esteem issues early into adolescents. It is important to address these issues early to prevent the social and emotional issues that will continue to cause psychological problems.

The overweight trend will continue without a change in the unhealthy tendencies of children. According to the center for Science in the Public Interest, only 2 percent of children eat a healthy diet, consistent with the standards set forth by the USDA food guide pyramid. Researchers also believe that whether or not a person remains physically active into adulthood is often determined by whether she or he develops an “athletic identity” during childhood.

Our concern for the health and well-being of young women and children will drive us to continue addressing these problems and promote a healthy lifestyle within our organization. However, we feel that it is important to create a plan to fight this problem by establishing a task force on the prevention and treatment of obesity.

The research conducted by our organization has proven that obesity is on the rise and without an increase in healthy habits the trend will continue to grow. For these reasons, I urge the Committee to recommend that the legislature adopt House Bill No. 2208. I would be happy to stand for questions.

