

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify on HB 2208.

Obesity is an epidemic in America whose rate has doubled in the past 10 years. At present, obesity is second only to smoking as the leading cause of preventable deaths, and the Center for Disease Control has announced that at its current rate of growth, obesity will by-pass smoking as the leading cause of preventable deaths this year. Being overweight or obese can lead to illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer. At last count, sixty percent of all Americans are overweight or obese and 400,000 die annually from morbid obesity.

In Kansas, one in four persons is obese, and more than six of every ten adults are overweight. Due to this, Kansas spent \$657 million last year on obesity related medical expenses, \$281 million of which was financed by Medicaid or Medicare. Yet there is no organized, comprehensive approach to solving the problem. Nationally, obesity costs society \$90 billion a year in direct medical expenses. About \$45 billion of those costs come out of taxpayers dollars to finance expenditures in Medicare and Medicaid. This comes out to about \$180 per year per taxpayer. Other potential costs of obesity include absenteeism, productivity, and quality of life.

Obesity is also a growing problem in children, its rates have doubled in children ages 2-5 and 12-19, and has tripled in children ages 6-11. Now, one-fourth of the children in the United States aged 5-10 years old have high cholesterol or high blood pressure, and studies indicate that one in three children born in the United States will be diagnosed with type II diabetes at some point in their life. Obese children are more likely to become obese adults, therefore treating and preventing obesity in children could be the answer to reducing the risk of adult obesity.

Nationwide, steps are being taken to fight this growing crisis. The Internal Revenue Service now allows taxpayers to claim weight loss expenses as medical deductions, while many state governments are targeting schools as the starting point for encouraging healthy lifestyles. Other states are creating obesity task forces and encouraging community efforts to increase public education on nutrition and health.

You can hardly pick up a magazine anymore without seeing an article on obesity. Just recently my husband gave me an article from a veterinary magazine about overweight people and their canine pets.

The purpose of this legislation is to form a task force to focus on obesity, and determine the best ways to deal with an illness that has affected sixty percent of our population. It will identify the extent and consequences of obesity for Kansas and develop an integrated statewide strategy for preventing and treating obesity. Addressing this issue can significantly reduce medical expenses, and ultimately, save lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this issue to you.

Representative Jo Ann Pottorff