

**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. 2417  
Tuesday, February 21, 2005

The Girl Scouts is an organization dedicated to young women and their future success. It is important to instill leadership, values, social conscience and confidence in each and every young child. The Girl Scout Councils of Kansas serve over 41,000 girls, ages 5-17, from across the state. Because of the large number of young women that we service in our state, we feel that it is important to help each girl reach their fundamental program goals, to provide for a successful future.

Our programs educate our children in leadership, arts and sciences, exploration, outdoor activities and health and fitness. With the increase in obesity and unhealthy habits, we feel that it is important that health and fitness become an ultimate goal within our organization and state. The Girl Scouts is dedicated to providing girls with unlimited opportunities in sports and fitness, and supporting them in eating well. However, we feel that it is important to address these issues among society as 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 obesity epidemic has been influenced by the lifestyles, culture, and behavior 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. If these diet and exercise issues are addressed at an early age, the obesity epidemic could be reversed.

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. Most conditions and diseases resulting from obesity will leave lasting effects on the individual, so it is important to address obesity before other health problems occur.

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.

To ensure the overall success of our young women and children, we must address the issues that our youth will continue to face. The Girl Scout Councils of Kansas will continue to educate on health and fitness and teach obesity prevention to the young women of our state. However, we feel that it is important to create a council on obesity prevention and management to reach our fellow Kansans.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity will overtake tobacco use as the leading cause of preventable death in 2005. It is estimated that obesity will be responsible for over 500,000 deaths next year. The obesity problem

will only worsen without additional research and education on the issue. I urge the committee to consider House Bill 2417, before the prevalence of the disease is too much to overcome.

I would be happy to address any questions that the committee may have.