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Casey J. Cordts, M.D., F.A.A.P.

Pediatric Hospitalist, Stormont-Vail Pediatrics

Proponent (Spoken Testimony)

SB 76

Senator Tyson and Members of the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today in support of the Senate Bill 76. As a local Pediatrician, I believe in supporting any policy that can help improve the overall health and well-being of children in the State of Kansas.

Sales tax can represent an unfair burden placed on purchasers in the State of Kansas. As one of 14 states that charges a sales tax on foodstuffs, citizens in Kansas pay a higher rate for healthy foods than many of our neighbors. Currently, our state sales tax is set at 6.5%, but due to additional city and county taxes, in some areas, that overall tax can exceed 10% of costs. This additional cost applied to groceries can greatly affect the ability of families, especially low-income families, to purchase healthy, nutritionally rich foods.

Obesity in Kansas

Obesity is a health epidemic in the United States. Its prevalence, according to most recent CDC data encompassing 2015-2016, shows that 39.8% of adults over age 18, representing 147 billion individuals, are classified as obese. In children ages 2-19, 12.7 million, or 18.5% can be classified as obese. These numbers are even higher for Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black individuals.

Kansas, as a state, is not exempt from obesity concerns. As recently as 2016, 31.2% of adults could be diagnosed as obese, another 35.6% classified as overweight. Numbers for children and adolescents are lower, but still alarming. Data from 2016 shows that 20.6% of adolescents and 13.9% of 2-4-year-old children are obese.

Costs of Obesity

The costs related to long-term obesity and poor nutrition are myriad. The National Center for Health Statistics estimates that medical costs for adults with obesity are, on average, \$1,429 more per year than for those with weight within recommended guidelines. Being obese leads to higher rates of many medical conditions, especially chronic conditions, like Diabetes Mellitus and heart disease.

Costs of Healthy Foods

The CDC tracks healthy eating habits as part of its Strategies to Prevent Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases. The most recent numbers from the 2018 report demonstrates that neither adults or children consume enough fruits and vegetables. Nationally, only 1 in 10 adults meets daily recommended requirements for fruits and vegetables. Kansans are in line with the national average, with 10% of adults getting enough fruits, and slightly worse for vegetables at 8.1%. Numbers are worse for youths, with only 9% of high school students meeting fruit recommendations and 2% meeting requirements for vegetables. In Kansas, 76% of schools offer salad bars, which is nearly double the national average, but this cannot be the only place great, fresh fruits and vegetables are made easily accessible to children. Most recent state reported data from 2013 indicate adolescents surveyed from Kansas reveal that 40% consume less than 1 fruit daily. The numbers for vegetables are slightly better, with only 35.7% of adolescents consuming less than 1 vegetable daily. The findings are not cause for optimism, as the average daily fruit intake is 1 serving, and average daily intake of vegetables is 1.3 servings for the State of Kansas.

Medical professionals have found several areas to focus on for change, hoping to curb rates of obesity in the United States. Cost of healthy foods is one of the main prohibiting factors in improving dietary habits. The current census data from the Health and Human Services (HHS) estimates that between 11-15% of households in the U.S are considered “food insecure.” As a result, The Centers for Disease Control has a CDC Guide to Strategies to Increase the Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables. One of the goals is to “increase access to and the availability of affordable, healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. The CDC believes that changes to food policy, specifically amendments such as those in SB 76, can be enacted with “the expectation that these changes will lead to increased consumption.”

Citations and Additional Sources for Information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables*. 2018. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2018.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables*. 2018. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2018.
- Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity. Data and Statistics, National Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov>