



## HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

3430 Courthouse Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-2013

Ken Ulman,  
Howard County Executive  
kulman@howardcountymd.gov

[www.howardcountymd.gov](http://www.howardcountymd.gov)  
FAX 410-313-3051  
TDD 410-313-2323

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Dr. Calvin Ball, Chairman  
Howard County Council  
3430 Courthouse Drive  
Ellicott City, MD 20143

Dear Dr. Ball and members of the Howard County Council:

I write to provide you with an update on plans for implementing Executive Order 09-2012 – “Providing Healthy Food and Beverage Choices on County-owned Property and During County-sponsored Meetings, Events and Programs.”

First, I want to thank you for your continued support over the last seven years of our efforts to create the healthiest possible environment for our families and our children. Each initiative has moved us closer to realizing a model public health community -- from school-based wellness centers and protecting children and teens from cancer-causing indoor tanning beds to our worksite wellness program, “Wellness Works”; and Healthy Restaurants, Schools, and Child Care programs.

It is because of your commitment and our work together that we are achieving great things. I was proud that U.S. News and World Report ranked us last month as the 13th healthiest county for children out of more than 3,000 in the country. The national publication cited our restriction on smoking in parks as one of the reasons for our high ranking. As you know, back in 2011, I signed the executive order that made Howard County the first in Maryland to ban smoking in our parks.

Howard County can never rest on its laurels, and must continue to move forward in all areas, including in community health. That is why I issued Executive Order 09-2012. As I noted when I signed the order, the Institute of Medicine has attributed 20 percent of the nation’s weight problems to consumption of sugary drinks, and obesity is a risk factor for heart disease, diabetes and stroke. Sugar-sweetened drinks (such as soda, juices with added sugar, sports and energy drinks, flavored teas and flavored waters) are the single largest source of added sugar in a child’s diet, and have been proven to contribute significantly to excess weight gain and is linked to obesity and the onset of adult diabetes and high blood pressure.

Since 2012, we have spent considerable time working to implement the policy spelled out in the executive order. We have developed beverage and packaged food standards in consultation with health advocates, as well as the food and beverage industry. We are executing new contracts for vending machines on county facilities to meet our standards.

While we seek to increase healthy options in the community, we also want to be reasonable with our standards. A recent discussion over whether and how our beverages standards should be applied at a county-sponsored event that is not on county property – notably, the 4th of July celebration at the Columbia lakefront – has prompted a healthy dialogue and an important review of our implementation of EO 09-2012.

While I believe it is appropriate to maintain best-practice standards on county property, I agree that once-a-year county-sponsored events that are not on county property might fall into a different category. Therefore, I am informing you that, effective immediately, our standards will apply only to events, meetings and programs that take place on county-owned property.

We will continue, however, to work to make healthy options available at these events, by providing vendors with information about our standards and the health benefits they confer. While I hope that this change may ease some community concern, it should not be viewed as an alteration to our commitment to health.

The recent discussion has also provided an opportunity to reexamine how we have implemented EO 09-2012. It has become clear to me that there needs to be more coordination, guidance and technical assistance for vendors regarding the healthy food and drink standards.

Therefore, I am forming an Implementation Oversight Committee comprised of representatives from the Health Department, Recreation and Parks, Citizen Services and Purchasing to oversee and coordinate our ongoing implementation of this policy. This committee will provide the best guidance to vendors, which will lead to increased options for food and drink sold on county property.

I remain flexible and open to the best implementation plan. At the same time, I remain committed to Howard County being a leader in health and nutrition, and in our government taking into account our residents' health and safety when making decisions about the types of products we sell or offer on county property. Serious health problems require action across a range of sectors and settings in order to be successful. Even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention listed the creation of local government nutrition standards as an important measure to address obesity in local communities.

Before the Council this month is legislation that constitutes a step in the wrong direction, restricting our ability to create the safest and healthiest community possible. It is reasonable and responsible for a local government to enact standards in a variety of areas, and curtailing the ability to adopt such standards is arbitrary and dangerous.

Researchers have proven that our surroundings – from the home and worksite to schools and neighborhoods – influence what we eat and can have a negative impact on our health. That is why we have been working so hard for so long to create a culture of health in Howard County. When it comes to what food and beverages the county decides to sell or provide on county-property, we want to make healthy choices the easy choice. I look forward to our continued work together to achieve our mutual objectives.

Sincerely,



Ken Ulman  
Howard County Executive