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### **Horizon Foundation Testimony in Support of Council Bill 17-2015** **May 18, 2015**

The Horizon Foundation is Maryland's largest independent health philanthropy. Our mission is to improve health and wellness for people who live or work in Howard County.

We approach our mission with a strategic mindset -- using the best available data about the needs of our community and deploying proven, effective strategies to address them.

Our collective conversation has advanced over the past few years. We now have broad recognition that the rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases represent a public health crisis.

We all understand the data. Now, we need to use national best practices -- combined with the values of Howard County -- to address this epidemic. CB-17 embodies this approach. This legislation borrows from national best practices, from both the public and private sectors, combined with compromises that reflect our community values. It comes ready for approval.

Over the last several years, the Horizon Foundation has invested millions of dollars in a community-wide education campaign to fight childhood obesity and reduce the consumption of sugary drinks. We have worked with numerous partners to distribute information far and wide; we have sent street teams to the places families live, work, and play to provide educational materials; we have aired advertisements on television, the radio, the internet and in public places like the Columbia mall; we have held numerous public events, written letters to the editor; drafted op-eds, delivered direct mail pieces, and more.

The point of all of this work is to help Howard County residents make better, healthier beverage choices—for themselves and for their families.

But we know, from years of academic research, that education alone is not enough to fight this growing crisis of chronic disease and change the behaviors at its root. Just as education coupled with public policy and environmental changes helped to reduce tobacco consumption and to increase seat belt use —both saving untold lives in the process—we must use all of these strategies to ensure our children do not die of premature death from preventable conditions.

We have preliminary results to suggest that our multi-faceted approach is working. Many organizations have stopped serving sugary drinks at their meetings and gatherings. The Howard County public school system



adopted a world-class wellness policy that improves the nutrition of food and drinks offered on school property. Employers like Howard County General Hospital have made changes to promote employee health. And for a time, Howard County Government sold only healthy options on its property.

Together, these policy and environmental changes *and* our community-wide educational campaign have resulted in the decline of sugary drinks sales in Howard County that are two-to-three times the national average.

So now is not the time to pull back on this work; now is the time to keep pushing forward to level the playing field, to make healthy the default in Howard County, and to extend the lives of our children.

This legislation includes reasonable exemptions to address community concerns; furthermore, it includes proven strategies to help people make better choices -- strategies that have been adopted by other governments and private businesses alike.

Rather than restrict choices, this legislation expands it.

There are some who object to the County requiring discounts and preferred placements for healthier options, but pricing and placement provisions are nothing new for vendors, as anyone who has ever stocked shelves at a grocery store would know.

These are not radical provisions meant to handicap private businesses profiting off of sales on public property; they are proven strategies used by businesses—including the beverage and junk food industries—to encourage certain behavior.

Only in the case of CB-17, these strategies are being used to promote health rather than maximize profit, at the expense of health and at the expense of residents who bear the health care costs for county employees.

Chronic diseases stemming from unhealthy lifestyle choices are causing great turmoil for those who are afflicted and their families; and they are also draining our health care system and dragging down our local economy, as shown in a study by Anirban Basu of the Sage Policy Group which was jointly sponsored by Horizon and the Howard County Chamber of Commerce.

This legislation will not cure all chronic disease, but coupled with continued education, it will help.

You have a choice: You can say no to protect a very narrow set of interests, or you can say yes to promote better health.

We are asking you to say yes to health.