

May 18, 2015

Dear Howard County Council Members,

As we look at the overall health and well-being in Howard County, it's important to take a well-rounded approach. Legislation that we pass promoting better health and well-being is critical to our leadership and success as a county.

It's no accident that we, as Americans are suffering the effects of obesity outlined in CB-17 as the availability of non-healthy food and drink options far outweighs healthier choices. Governments, organizations, and communities around the world are taking steps to promote health by providing incentives to purchase healthier food, and I, as a citizen of Howard County fully support our participation in this positive movement for change. 69 states and localities have policies in place to improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages on some or all of their property.¹ Countries like Mexico have levied taxes on high calorie foods. Now, this bill doesn't go so far as levying taxes, but instead provides a sensible framework for regulation that makes it easier for County residents to make healthier choices. What's important is that the framework is supported by evidence based studies that suggest that things like taxation, subsidies, and other economic incentives actually support changes to healthier behaviors.

There are lots of examples like the Chicago Park District example where they implemented 100% healthier products in park vending machines in 2012 and saw average monthly per-machine sales go up. They also found that 88% of park-goers reacted positively to the healthier options with the leading complaint being that they weren't healthy enough. Making vending options healthier just makes sense.

Providing exemptions in the legislation for events that county residents felt should be exempted makes sense.

I've heard some objections to section 12.1801 (c) Water must be made available free-or-charge at all county sponsored events when other packaged food and beverages are being sold or offered. However, this makes sense, as this requirement isn't one for bottled water being provided. So, this isn't a costly proposition, and doesn't veer far from the provision of water fountains in public places.

So in closing, I hope you will support this legislation. It's aligned with the goals of having a healthy, prosperous county.

Thank you,

Rosalyn Williams, 4722 Roundhill Road, Ellicott City, MD 21043

Sources:

AHA Scientific Statement Population Approaches to Improve Diet, Physical Activity, and Smoking Habits
A Scientific Statement From the American Heart Association –

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3881293/>

Center for Science in the Public Interest – Healthier Food Choices for Public Places -

<http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/foodstandards.html>