

TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST OF

LD 752, Resolve, to Require the Department of Health & Human Services to Request a Waiver to Prohibit the Use of Food Stamps for the Purchase of Soft Drinks.

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 209, Cross State Office Building
Tuesday, March 31, 2009

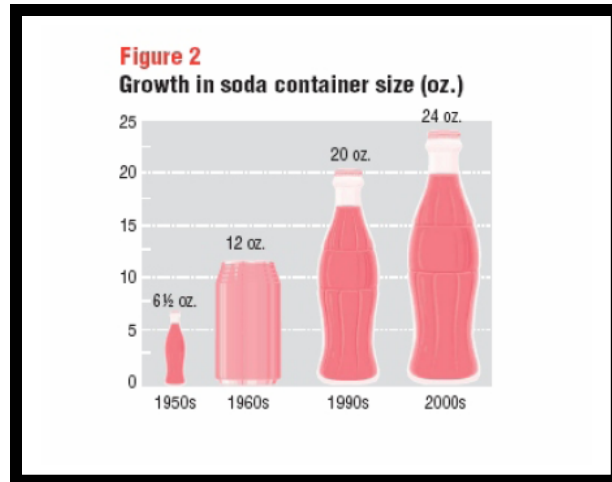
Good afternoon Senator Brannigan, Representative Perry and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services, I am Kellie Miller, Director of Public Health Policy for the Maine Medical Association (MMA), a professional organization representing over 3,000 physicians, residents and medical students, speaking Neither For Nor Against on *LD 752, Resolve, to Require the Department of Health & Human Services to Request a Waiver to Prohibit the Use of Food Stamps for the Purchase of Soft Drinks.*

Although, the goal of this bill is to provide a mechanism to decrease consumption of soda pop beverages, we believe that we **ALL** would be better served to initiate **effective public health strategies to reduce consumption of soft drinks on a community-wide basis to improve the health of ALL people in the state of Maine.** This legislation is much too narrow in its approach. To be effective, any strategy to improve the public's health should target the root of the problem and across all populations. Low-income consumers are subject to the same factors that influence food choices as other families in our communities.

We need to provide education to consumers about the health risks associated with certain foods, counter the slick advertising campaigns that influence our choices at the grocery store, and encourage and support legislation that provides incentives to increase consumption of healthier foods and beverages.

Sweetened soft drinks are the single most consumed food in the American Diet and some are now calling it "*The New Liquid Candy.*" Soda consumption among **ALL** US children has jumped almost 500 percent over the last 50 years. After age 10, soda is the most commonly consumed beverage among children. Sugar-sweetened beverages such as soft drinks and fruit drinks are the primary source of added sugar in a child's daily diet.

The global issue we are grappling with is larger packaging and low prices. One reason, aside from the ubiquitous advertising, for increasing consumption is that the industry has steadily increased container sizes. In the 1950's, Coca-Cola's 6.5 oz bottle was the standard serving. That grew into the 12-ounce can, and now those are being supplanted by 20 ounce bottles (and gargantuan products like the 64 ounce Double Gulp!) The larger the container, the more people are likely to drink, especially when they assume they are buying single-serving containers. (see figure 2)



Also, pricing practices encourage people to purchase large servings. For instance, at fast food restaurants, one can purchase a 16 ounce (“small”) soda beverage, for say \$1.05, while a drink 100 percent larger (32 ounce “large”) costs only 50 percent more (about \$1.57).

Just as soaring rates of obesity have shocked Americans, so should the increasing consumption by **ALL** consumers of one of the major causes of obesity. What was once a rare treat in a small serving is now served up morning, noon, and night, virtually everywhere Americans happen to be. How did a solution of high-fructose corn syrup, water, and artificial flavors come to be the default beverage?

Let’s put our efforts into providing education to consumers about the health risks associated with drinking soft drinks and to counter the advertising that influences our choices. We could begin by placing *health messages* on soft drinks that might include:

- The Maine Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that you drink less (non-diet) soda to help prevent weight gain, tooth decay, and other health problems.
- To help protect your waistline and your teeth, consider drinking water.
- Drinking soft drinks instead of milk or calcium fortified beverages may increase your risk of brittle bones (osteoporosis)
- This drink contains “X” grams of caffeine, which is a mildly addictive stimulant drug. Not appropriate for children.
- Drinking too many non-diet soft drinks could cause diabetes by increasing your weight.
- This can (bottle/liter) of soda has “X” teaspoons of sugar. It is recommended that you consume on “X” of teaspoons of sugar daily.

This is just one example of positive public health policy strategies that can provide families with the tools they need to make more informed beverage choices to reduce consumption of soft drinks. Let’s not stigmatize one group of people. It is very evident when you look at the statistics that all of our diets could use improvement.

Thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions.