



# MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

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## TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

### IN SUPPORT OF

### **L.D 1160, AN ACT TO REDUCE OBESITY AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN**

Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs  
Room 202, Cross State Office Building  
Tuesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1:00 pm

Good afternoon Senator Millett, Representative MacDonald, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Dr. Amina Qazi, a cardiologist practicing with Northeast Cardiology Associates in Bangor. I am a member of the Maine Medical Association (MMA) and the incoming Governor of the Northern New England Chapter of the American College of Cardiology. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person today due to my patient schedule so I have asked that Jessa Barnard, Associate General Counsel of the MMA, deliver my testimony on behalf of the Maine Medical Association in favor of LD 1160, *An Act To Reduce Obesity among Schoolchildren*.

The MMA is a professional association representing more than 3,800 physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine whose mission is to support Maine physicians, advance the quality of medicine in Maine, and promote the health of all Maine citizens. I am also here this afternoon on behalf of the MMA's Public Health Committee. This is a group of over 30 physicians particularly committed to addressing issues of prevention and promoting the health of Mainers.

Obesity – and the increasing prevalence of obesity among children – is one of our State's most pressing public health problems. The MMA's Public Health Committee currently considers it one our top priorities for 2013. Physicians of all specialties are increasingly seeing the impacts of childhood overweight and obesity in our daily practice. Pediatricians, family physicians and endocrinologists are called on to treat more children

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with diabetes medications developed for adults as they are diagnosed at younger and younger ages with Type 2 diabetes (previously called adult onset diabetes). Cardiologists like me are concerned about the growing number of children developing high cholesterol and high blood pressure, which are risk factors for heart disease. Orthopedists are seeing children with bone and joint problems, and psychiatrists counsel children who are subject to bullying and stigmatization due to their weight. Obesity threatens the health of today's children to such an extent that they may, for the first time in US history, have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

Fortunately, the majority of Maine youth are of healthy weight, but the majority of Maine adults are overweight or obese. Therefore, a major health challenge for Maine's children and adolescents is obesity prevention—today, and as they age into adulthood. It is much more effective to prevent obesity in the first place.

That is why the Maine Medical Association supports LD 1160. It is a fairly modest bill that will not create mandates or costs for Maine schools. Yet, it is an important step in the right direction. As you have heard, the bill will require that children have the opportunity to be physically active for 30 minutes each day during the school day – getting us at least half way to the 60 minutes per day that physicians and the US Department of Health and Human Services recommend. The bill also prohibits food being used as a reward or punishment in the classroom. Physicians support teaching kids from an early age that you eat food at mealtimes when you are hungry and are concerned that using unhealthy food as a routine part of classroom rewards or behavior management undermines school nutrition programs.

Preventing and reducing obesity in our State will take a multifaceted approach. The MMA has two policies on obesity that both support the elements of LD 1160 as a part of this approach. I have attached them for your review. Maine physicians ask that you vote “ought to pass” on LD 1160. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.