

Anthony Iarrapino  
Campaign Director  
Alliance for a Healthier Vermont

From: Anthony Iarrapino <healthiervermont@gmail.com>

Date: January 27, 2015 at 4:25:12 PM EST

To: wlippert@leg.state.vt.us

**Subject: Sugary Drinks Tax Information**

Dear Rep. Lippert:

Congratulations on your new assignment chairing House Health Care. There are few spots so important to the both the health and economics of Vermont and Vermonters. I know you are busy managing your new responsibilities, but I wanted to take a moment to brief you via email on the Alliance for a Healthier Vermont's campaign to secure a \$.02 excise tax on sugary drinks this session. Members of the Alliance will be available to meet in person later in the session as this issue gains traction as part of the debate over the Miscellaneous Tax Bill or at any time prior to that when it is convenient for you.

I'd first call your attention to the size and diversity of the Alliance. With more than 30 organizations (full list here), our growing coalition includes virtually all of the institutional and advocacy communities that come before your committee. From the hospitals, doctors, pharmacists, nurses and dentists, to the folks at VPIRG, Voices for Vermont Children, Vermont Leads, AARP, Vermont Legal Aid Office of Health Care Advocate, and VLIAC, et al. Many of these groups are divided on key health care issues (e.g., single payer, dental providers). When it comes to an excise tax on sugary drinks and prevention-based revenue package, they are united.

This unity arises from deep concern about the obesity epidemic and the many costly, life-threatening illnesses related to obesity, including:

- type II diabetes,
- heart disease,
- several forms of cancer, and
- extreme tooth decay.

In Vermont today, 63% of adults and 29% of children are either overweight or obese, and our overall obesity rate has climbed up from eleven percent in 1990 to nearly twenty-five percent of Vermont's population today..

The Alliance recognizes the urgent need for action.

Public Health researchers have linked sugary drink consumption, which rose 500 percent in the last fifty years, to the rise in obesity. Estimates attribute 1/5th of all the weight gained in the U.S. since 1977 to sugary drink consumption. According to the Vermont Department of Health, those Vermonters drinking three or more sugary drinks per day are significantly more likely to be obese than those drinking zero-two per day.

To learn more about why liquid sugar is of particular concern, I suggest this very user-friendly website <http://www.sugarscience.org/sugar-sweetened-beverages/#.VMZz25XwtOw>

This crisis is bad for our physical health and our fiscal health. Currently, illnesses linked to adult obesity are costing Vermont employers and taxpayers \$202 million each year (figures for spending related to childhood obesity are not yet available, but would likely drive overall spending figures significantly higher). Tragically, we are also spending about \$2.5 million per year to treat dental problems in children under six that are so severe they must be dealt with in hospital settings. This is no surprise when we have dental hygienists in our Alliance reporting how frequently they see children (from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds) coming into the office drinking sugary drinks in sippy cups.

With alarming statistics like these, Vermont must do all it can to stem the obesity epidemic and reduce other health problems related to the crazy amounts of sugar being consumed. For reference, the American Heart Association recommends that adult women consume no more than 6 tsp of added sugar per day, 9 tsp for men, and no more than 2-3 for children. Meanwhile, one 20 o.z. Coke, widely-available as a single-serving, has 16.75 teaspoons, one Mountain Dew has 19.75 tsps. Yes, you read that right, 19.75 tsps. And some kids are drinking four to five a day!

Some, like the Governor, claim better education alone can solve this problem. This is a view not shared by public health professionals on the front lines of this problem because it does not work. Our doctors, nurses, and dentists daily educate their patients, but they are up against the nearly \$1 billion the sugary drinks industry spends annually on marketing and advertising each year, often targeting children to keep their consumer base growing. Education may be part of the solution, but without more it will not work.

A solution that we know works on bending the curve on consumption is the pocketbook. The tobacco tax has been one of the most successful taxes when it comes to encouraging healthier consumer choices and in raising revenue to offset health care costs resulting from unhealthy choices.

Like a tax on tobacco, a sugary drinks tax is designed to reduce consumption to improve health of families and children and to reduce overall health care costs related to obesity-related illnesses. Less sugary drink consumption means less risk of obesity, tooth decay, and other illness. That is a positive outcome for people at every income level. Studies have shown that people who are obese or have bad teeth suffer economically because they have a harder time finding jobs and are often paid lower wages.

It is important to recognize that these drinks have no nutritional value and are not life essentials. Thus, Vermonters at any income level can avoid paying this tax by making healthier choices, including buying milk (which would benefit the farm economy) or drinking clean water from their faucets, something that we all already pay for and are fortunate to have as compared to people living in other parts of the country and the world.

Moreover, a two-cent-per-ounce excise tax on sugary drinks has the potential to raise more than \$30 million annually for Vermont in its early years of implementation. This money could be used to fund programs that help low-income Vermonters lead healthier lives, such as programs to

make health care more affordable and improve access to nutritious foods like fresh fruit and vegetables.

Thank you for your time and please let me know if you have any follow-up questions or need additional information.

--

Anthony Iarrapino  
Campaign Director  
Alliance for a Healthier Vermont  
802.522.2802  
"Less Sugar for Better Health"  
Follow us on Twitter: @HealthierVT  
Like us on Facebook: Alliance for a Healthier Vermont