



**Statement by Tina Zuk  
American Heart Association  
Government Relations Director, VT**

We believe that S.196 -- with its clear goal of optimizing contract performance with the state – is a good vehicle to amend to include healthy food procurement language to ensure that not only state contracts related to food procurement, but any other case where the state government sells or serves food, must meet nationally recognized nutrition standards.

This effort will help us to reach our goal of making the healthy choice the easy choice for state employees and others. It also truly offers a *real* choice of food options.

We've included legislation for you to consider which is identical to legislation introduced in the House that would instruct the Commissioner of Health to promulgate final rules establishing evidence-based nutrition and food procurement standards that are consistent with:

- The General Services Administration document "Health and Sustainability Guidelines for Federal Concessions and Vending Operations,"
- The American Heart Association "Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit," or
- The National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity "Model Beverage and Food Vending Machine Standards" or a combination of these standards

to be implemented by State agencies within one year of the date that the final rules are issued.

The nutrition guidelines that the Vermont Department of Health has crafted and BGS is using for requirements in state contracts are a good start. A recent summary of various contracts and procurement from BGS shows a strong effort to encourage procurement of *local* food but stronger requirements need to be met in terms of meeting *nutrition* standards.

To date, **no nutrition standards are mandated so there is no across the board standardization** and the guidelines VDH has recommended for BGS and other agencies miss some key areas such as sodium.

As spelled out in our draft legislation, we would want very clear and specific nutrition requirements taken directly from three nationally recognized nutrition guidelines. The draft language we're proposing would allow Vermont to choose to follow one of the national guidelines or a mix of all three.

I have attached a comparison chart showing how VDH's nutrition guidelines compare to these national guidelines in food service. **VDH is very close to meeting GSA standards except for sodium.** We would also want catered meals to have the same nutrition standards and specific calorie requirements are missing from the VDH guidelines but **it would not take much to strengthen the guidelines to meet national standards.**

The VDH nutrition guidelines for vending are a mix of the GSA/HHS standards and the NANA vending standards. However don't include labeling and only require 50% of the vending products to meet nutrition criteria. National guidelines state 100% of the products need to meet the criteria and

our specific concern here is with sodium as it is a very important nutrient to reduce in order to improve heart health. One third of Vermont adults already have hypertension.

- **The standardization is what we believe is critical, and thus, is why we believe should be mandated across all state agencies. It truly does make the healthy choice the easy choice. And follows the goals of Vermont's Health in All Policies.**
- **All agencies would be following the same nationally recognized standards and the government would be serving as a model for businesses across the state to follow.**
- Obesity and diet-related diseases are costing Vermont \$290 million each year.
  - About half of those costs are paid by government through Medicare and Medicaid.
  - The other costs are paid by businesses and individual citizens.
  - Diet-related diseases reduce productivity and increase absenteeism of the workforce
- Requiring nutrition standards at state agencies would show other Vermont businesses and organizations that state government is "walking the walk" to assure access to healthy foods and beverages while trying to reduce the burden of obesity on health care.
- Providing healthier food options on public property is a sensible, **low-cost** chronic disease prevention strategy.
- A study by the Hudson Institute found that companies that increased healthier food and beverage offerings experienced superior sales growth, operating profits, and operating profit growth.
- State employees and the public want healthier food! 89% of the Waterbury state employees surveyed by VDH said they prefer healthy foods in their diet always or as often as possible. And 75% said they'd be willing to spend more money for healthier options.
- **Another very important point is that once the government, as a major purchaser, begins to require more healthy food options, this will create a healthier supply of food from distributors for others.**
- Providing for healthier food and beverage options does not limit choice, it actually increases choice.
  - By not providing healthy options, the consumer who want to eat healthier do not have that option.

**The Bottom Line:** There is an obesity epidemic in the U.S. that Vermont isn't immune from with the majority of its population at an unhealthy weight.

States need to walk-the-walk and provide healthy options on their property, they have the right to determine which foods and beverages are sold on their own property or facilities, healthy options can be profitable for vendors, and offering healthier options helps to keep government employees, visitors, and custodial populations healthier to help reduce health care costs and lost productivity.

This is a very low cost option Vermont can take to address obesity when we are currently allocating no funds to prevent obesity.