

Dear Representatives on the Human Services Committee,

More than a year ago, I wrote the following email to the Senate committee considering S. 70. I am very heartened to see that the bill stripped away many of the issues that I had concerns with in the first reading, but I am disappointed that the Senate is insisting on fruit juice alternatives. My full note to the Senate committee is below, but I'm pulling out the section on fruit juice here for you to look at first. Please consider striking this bill. The heart is in the right place, but juice is not all its cracked up to be.

Many thanks,

Chris Webb
Brookline, VT

- Offering fruit juice might not be the best idea. Fruit juice concentrates fruit sugars without the benefits of nutrition, such as dietary fiber, from the rest of the fruit. Many diabetics are warned against drinking fruit juice for this reason, yet diabetes is cited as one *raison d'etre* for this law. NPR released a report in 2014 that compared fruit juice and soda. In third place for fructose was Minute Maid 100% Apple Juice, just behind Mountain Dew and Mug Root Beer, with a whopping 65.8 grams of sugar per liter. Ocean Spray 100% Cranberry Juice had more 10 grams per liter more sugar than 7-Up. Tropicana 100% Orange Juice came in at 28.3 grams, toward the bottom of the list. (link: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/06/09/319230765/fruit-juice-vs-soda-both-beverages-pack-in-sugar-and-health-risk>) While soda can have deleterious effects, it is a misunderstanding to think that 100% fruit juice is a better alternative. Both deliver sugar and should probably be avoided. That 100% fruit juices are highlighted leads me to believe much of the data used to determine how to feed kids in this law is suspect. If the legislature is not going to take this to a granular level, these mandates for restaurants will not move the needle on childhood nutrition.

Fruit Juice Vs. Soda? Both Beverages Pack In Sugar, Health Risks

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Juice seems more natural and healthful than soda because it comes from fruit. But a study found that fruit juices have almost as much fructose as soda, which may make them just as unhealthy for you.

The full letter:

Dear Senators,

As a trained health counselor, herbalist, and former educator, I admire the impetus behind Senate Bill 70 (An act relating to the nutritional requirements for children's meals), because the health of children is important. I break from the good intentions of those who crafted this legislation, however, because I don't believe that it is the purview of our government to tell restaurants what they can serve people, if the food they are serving is legal to consume.

Here are the aspects of the bill with which I quibble:

- "(4) Families in Vermont have limited time to obtain and prepare healthy food, making dining out an appealing and often necessary option:" I find this to be a troubling statement to memorialize into law, because methods of food acquisition and preparation are a matter of choice. Growing up, I had two working parents and my brother and I were both active in extracurricular activities. Because of their staggered hours, food preparation fell to my mother, and we had a home cooked meal every night. Eating out was a very special occasion. Sometimes my brother and I would help out when we got home from school, before our mother was in from work. That people don't prioritize mealtime is a cultural issue and creating legislation to combat that strikes me as not addressing issues of demands on working families that could be alleviated via other social policies, ones that might open space for cooking at home, rather than dictating what can be purchased when out to eat.
- The calorie and other guidelines, again, are well intentioned, but whether you force a business to offer the type of meal listed or not, you won't necessarily see people making those choices. Parents might order off the regular menu for their kids or order two meals or any myriad opportunities to get around the mandated meal.
- In regulating the dietary intake of children at restaurants, the broad strokes of the food that is allowed does not take into account the nature of the food that is being provided. Not all meat protein is the same. A grain-fed cow offers a lot more omega-6 fatty acids, while a grass-fed and -finished cow provides a balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids that fit the profile of what is healthy for human consumption. Table 2 from this study in Nutrition Journal shows the ratio imbalance of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids in grain-fed beef. A good diet has a ratio of 1-4:1 omega 6:omega 3. Studies on grass-fed cows show that the fatty acid profile consistently falls within this proper ratio, while grain-fed cows rarely do, and they have ratios of 8, 9, 10, and 13:1 in studies. This inconsistency is remarkable, because it shows that grain-fed animals cannot guarantee an outcome proper to health. So, if meat is on the menu, will the legislature be showing preference to properly grown animals?
(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2846864/>)
- A pastured chicken also provides a different make-up of meat compared to a cage-free animal. Chickens can also receive a lot of antibiotics, will the chickens be mandated to be antibiotic-free? And will they be mandated to be pastured? For egg protein, a 2010 Penn State study showed that eggs from pasture foragers are more nutritious than grain-fed chickens' eggs.
(<http://news.psu.edu/story/166143/2010/07/20/research-shows-eggs-pastured-chickens-may-be-more-nutritious>)
- Offering fruit juice might not be the best idea. Fruit juice concentrates fruit sugars without the benefits of nutrition, such as dietary fiber, from the rest of the fruit. Many diabetics are warned against drinking fruit juice for this reason, yet diabetes is cited as one raison d'etre for this law. NPR released a report in 2014 that compared fruit juice and soda. In third place for fructose was Minute Maid 100% Apple Juice, just behind Mountain Dew and Mug Root Beer, with a whopping 65.8 grams of sugar per liter. Ocean Spray 100% Cranberry Juice had more 10 grams per liter more sugar than 7-

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In all, I believe that the legislature could be better served in the following three areas:

- School meals are where kids get most of their food. Elevating the nutritional input of school meals, deepening investment in farm to school programs, and teaching true nutrition in the classroom could be more beneficial in setting kids up with good habits.
- Determining ways to extend Vermont's bounty into the hands of more people. Finding ways to expand access to nutritious food to people who might not be typical farmers market consumers would be a nice start.
- Advocating for what I call properly grown food. Extending funding that goes to farms to those that pasture their animals would be most beneficial to health since we are typically a meat-eating society.

I applaud the legislature's concerns about health, but I believe Senate Bill 70 misses the mark, even wildly so. Setting up public policy that addresses the causes of poor diet and health and puts money behind initiatives to turn the tide of how we grow and access our food will be more beneficial than invasively acting upon mere symptoms of the problem.