

**Testimony of Hillary Caron
Center for Science in the Public Interest**

**Before the Vermont House Committee on Human Services
Hearing on S. 70 – An act relating to the nutritional requirements for children’s meals
April 11, 2018**

Thank you, Chairwoman Pugh and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) strongly supports S. 70, which will promote the health of Vermont’s children by making healthier beverages the default option with restaurant children’s meals.

CSPI is a nonprofit organization supported by our 500,000 members and subscribers in the U.S., including over 2,000 members in Vermont. Since 1971, we have worked to make it easier for people to eat healthfully so they can avoid heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, and other diet- and obesity-related diseases. CSPI has led successful efforts to secure and update Nutrition Facts labels on packaged foods, improve school food, ensure calories are labeled on menus at chain restaurants and supermarkets, and remove trans fat from the food supply.

Nationally, one-third of children and adolescents are overweight or obese.¹ While prevalence is somewhat lower in Vermont, still a quarter of Vermont children are overweight or obese.² These children are more likely to be overweight or obese in adulthood, increasing their risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes.^{3,4} Children with obesity are also at risk for social and emotional health consequences stemming from stigmatization and social discrimination, which can negatively impact academic success and social development.³

Sugary drinks, including soda, sugary fruit drinks, and sports drinks, are a top source of calories in children’s diets.⁵ At fast-food and table-service restaurants, sugary beverages are regularly sold as part of children’s meals or on children’s menus.⁶ Sugary drinks are often automatically included with children’s meals, adding unnecessary calories with little or no nutritional benefit.⁷ Designating particular foods and beverages as children’s menu items or bundling them together as children’s meals is a powerful form of marketing that helps to establish food norms for children, which can affect their preferences and lifelong eating patterns.⁸ These norms are reinforced through television ads, online, and in other marketing, as restaurants are the largest category of food and beverage marketing to children.^{9,10}

S. 70 will help make the healthier choice—water, milk, or 100% juice—easier for parents to make, while protecting their freedom to choose what they prefer for their children.

CSPI and other members of the Food Marketing Workgroup have been working to encourage restaurants to improve the nutritional quality of their children’s meals. Several of the largest national restaurant chains have already voluntarily removed sugary drinks from their children’s menus. Since 2013, McDonald’s, Wendy’s, Burger King, Dairy Queen, IHOP, Jack in the Box, and Applebee’s have taken soda and other sugary drinks off their children’s menus. Subway and Panera also do not promote sugary drinks through kids meals. While some progress has been

made, there is still a long way to go. In a study released last summer, CSPI found that although the percentage of top restaurant chains offering sugary drinks on children's menus has declined in recent years, from 93 percent in 2008 and 83 percent in 2012, 74 percent of the top chains still offer sugary drinks on children's menus.⁶

Some states and localities frustrated with the slow pace of change are turning to public policy to improve restaurant children's meals in their own communities. The cities of Davis, Stockton, Perris, Berkeley, Cathedral City, Long Beach, and Daly City and Santa Clara County in California, and the city of Lafayette in Colorado, have all adopted ordinances providing for healthy default beverages in restaurant children's meals. The Baltimore City Council is the latest to pass a policy, which the Mayor is expected to sign later this month. Similar policies have been introduced or are being considered in other jurisdictions nationwide, including a statewide bill passed by the Hawaii State Senate in March that is currently being considered in the House.

We urge Vermont to join this growing movement. Healthier children's meals can reduce sugary drink consumption, encourage children to form lifelong healthy eating habits, and support the efforts of parents to feed their children well. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

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