

January 31, 2018

Attention Health and Welfare Committee,

As both a parent of multiple young children and a restaurant owner, I feel strongly that the S.70/H.264 article currently being presented in legislation is of solid merit and I endorse it with an easy conscience.

As a parent, I struggle every day to provide my children with well balanced meals that don't contain high levels of saturated fats and sugars. Despite the fact that my kids take lunches from home, and eat balanced prepared meals by myself, they are exposed to all types of unhealthy and dangerously toxic manufactured foods at school and in the outside community, including the restaurant that I own. Although my children have been armed with information, and will sometimes make the right choices when we're dining out, the availability of healthy options for kids is seriously lacking, and more times than not I will pack a backpack full of food from home to avoid this conflict.

My husband and I own The Diner in Middlebury, Vermont which can easily be considered a greasy spoon. This particular restaurant is considered a local icon and has been a small-town diner for over 70 years. When we first took over the business, we attempted to provide healthier, more well-balanced items that derived from home based recipes, but the majority of our clientele (including those with children) responded very negatively to the changes. Most of our customers are price shoppers, with a lack of education or cultural foundation in proper nutrition. As an owner, and with the need to support my own family financially, I have felt conflicted with the choice of providing healthier children's meals with an increased price, and simply providing our current clientele with what they are used to.

If this legislation is passed, it would in fact provide a slight increase in work for those of us in the industry, but by no means would put anybody out of business. However, with all change comes an adjustment period and sometimes with more mandation, it makes those types of changes easier to adjust to. This would apply to both employees and customers, as they would find the same mandates regardless of where they choose to eat and therefore would create no competitive disadvantage. In all actuality, if all restaurants were providing the same caliber of kid's meals, we may even see in an increase in clientele like myself.

Six months ago, in Middlebury we were suddenly instructed to switch over to composting all food based items and had to completely restructure the way that we handled our waste at the restaurant. This required employees to change old habits, provide separate waste bins, sort things accordingly and although old habits die hard, eventually everyone conformed to the new norm and collectively we all know it's for the greater good. I view this piece of legislation as the same, and although I believe it's human nature to cringe at change and procrastinate what feels difficult, I am more than willing to do my part so that I can feel good about what I'm serving the children of my community.

I am privileged to have my opinion be heard, and appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this exciting new development in our Vermont community. If you have any further questions for me I would be happy to help in any way that I can.

Cordially,

Caetlin Harwood

The Diner