



**January 18, 2023**

**To:** Senate Education Committee

**From:** Tina Zuk, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association

**Re:** S.10 – Water bottle filling stations

- Thank you, for inviting me to speak on S.10. The American Heart Association would like to voice strong support for this bill.

**Requirements:**

- This bill would require school districts to install water bottle filling stations in schools when there is new construction or major renovation (\$500,000) of existing buildings.
- It would require a minimum of one water bottle filling station for every 200 people, one on each floor of the building, and one near cafeterias, gymnasiums or outdoor recreational spaces and other high traffic areas.
- It would need to be maintained with clean, cooled and filtered water and water bottles would need to be permitted in schools.
- This legislation would apply to school construction or major renovation that commences on or after July 1, 2023. And it would require the Agency of Education to amend its rules to include these requirements.

**Cost:**

- It is important to note that this bill has no immediate cost. The requirement would only take effect when districts are investing in new school buildings or are doing major upgrades to existing facilities.
- Water is a basic human need that kids cannot live without – and there is no doubt that all kids in all U.S. schools should have access to water at no cost. But the reality is that water that is both safe and appealing is not readily available at many schools.
- I have also provided a fact sheet with some examples of the cost of water bottle filling stations. They are reasonable ranging between \$1100 and \$2000. The statehouse has similar fountains.

- However, a significant cost to consider is in not providing water filling stations.
- Amid the COVID pandemic, the CDC now encourages staff and students to bring their own water to minimize use and touching of water fountains.
- And in one study, water fountains and manual pencil sharpener handles were found to be the germiest surfaces in the classroom.
- A national survey showed that more than half of school-aged children were inadequately hydrated.
- 27% of Vermont high school students are overweight or obese and 22% of VT middle school students drink less than a glass a day.

### Public health benefits:

- Water plays an important role in maintaining a child’s overall health. Drinking sufficient water reduces the likelihood of kids being at an unhealthy weight.
- Water filling stations can triple how much water students drink at lunchtime.
- Substituting sugary drinks with low or no calorie beverages like water can prevent excess weight gain and could cut up to 235 calories per day.
- Drinking water supports children’s muscles, joints, and tissues; improves their digestive system; and keeps their growing bodies hydrated.
- Adequate water intake can positively impact children’s cognitive performance, particularly short-term memory.
- Drinking water can also improve children’s visual attention and fine motor skills, which helps with learning activities such as reading.
- Water bottle filling stations may help reduce the spread of germs and disease.

### Changing Norms Means Making the Health Choice the Easy Choice:

- As Health Commissioner Levine has repeatedly testified, if we want to bring about behavior change, we need to take actions that address the most impactful layers of the health impact pyramid. One of these is to make an individual’s default choice healthy. i.e. making the healthy choice the easy choice. This accomplishes that. It also helps to change norms by getting kids to drink more water more often, not sugary beverages.
- Let’s put safe and appealing water within reach for all Vermont students by passing S.10. Thank you for your consideration.

