



February 14, 2022

Testimony of Laura Hale

American Heart Association

### **Support of HB 661 Health - Food Service Facilities - Beverage Options With Children's Meals**

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby and Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its support for HB 661 Health - Food Service Facilities - Beverage Options With Children's Meals. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

### **A Commonsense Health Policy**

Passage and implementation of HB 662 would be a piece of the puzzle to reverse poor health trend that we are seeing across the state due to sugary drink consumption and give parents and kids healthier choices, by ensuring that beverages on kids' meals menus include an automatic option for a healthy drink like water, milk, or 100% fruit juice. It would only apply to bundled restaurant children's meals.

This is a commonsense approach to help all residents make healthier choices. Importantly, **nothing in this law would prevent parents from purchasing less healthy beverage for a child**. This policy would simply make the healthy choice the easy choice.

The science is clear that reducing consumption of less healthy food and drinks can lessen the risk for unhealthy weight, heart disease, diabetes, and other diet-related conditions – which are more prevalent among communities of color in the county and around the country. Yes, **this is an issue of health equity and social justice**. Everyone should have access to healthy food and be able to make healthier choices.

### **The Evidence and Rationale is Clear**

This policy is so necessary, since the research tells us:

- Many **kids are consuming 10 times the recommended amount of added sugar**.
  - The American Heart Association recommends children consume no more than one eight-ounce sugary drink each week.<sup>i</sup>
  - Kids consume 30 gallons of sugary drinks each year on average, enough to fill a bathtub!<sup>ii</sup>
- In addition to weight gain, **excess consumption of added sugars, especially from sugary drinks, raises the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and tooth decay**<sup>iii</sup>
  - Increasing sugary drink consumption by one serving per day increases the risk of hypertension by 8% and the risk of heart disease by 17%
  - Each additional serving of sugary drinks per day increases the risk of type 2 diabetes by 13-18%. Over 10 years, about two million type 2 diabetes cases in the US are attributable to consumption of sugary beverages.

- Sugary drinks like sports drinks, energy drinks, and soda are the leading source of added sugar in the American diet, and communities of color are disproportionately targeted in marketing, resulting in significant health disparities and health inequities.<sup>iv</sup>

The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on HB 661 to support the health of all Marylanders.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/img/Fast-Facts/sugary-drink-fast-facts-january-2020.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://newsroom.heart.org/news/american-academy-of-pediatrics-and-american-heart-association-endorse-suite-of-policies-to-reduce-kids-consumption-of-sugary-drinks>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/sugary-drink-fast-facts-9.28.2020.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> [http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/Sugary\\_Drink\\_FACTS\\_Full%20Report.pdf](http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/Sugary_Drink_FACTS_Full%20Report.pdf)