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HB 661

February 16, 2022

TO: Members of the House Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director, Office of Government Relations

RE: Health - Food Service Facilities - Beverage Options with Children's Meals

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 661.

HB 661 seeks to establish a healthier baseline for children's meals by requiring that the default beverage option is water, milk, non-dairy beverage, or 100% fruit juice rather than the traditional, often sugar-sweetened beverage options. Importantly, the bill still allows for other beverage options to be provided at the purchaser's request.

In 2018, Baltimore City passed the Healthy Beverages for Children's Meals bill (C.B. 17-0152), which established at a local level what this bill is seeking to establish statewide. Research from the CDC showed that school-age children in Baltimore were experiencing higher levels of obesity and intake of sugary beverages than recommended. Children in the City are also disproportionately impacted by the lack of healthy foods. These factors contributed to a range of preventable and expensive illnesses.

Importantly, the City bill did not place any new burdens on businesses that offer children's meals. The default beverage options are items that are often already available at most restaurants. And consumers still have the option to choose which beverage they ultimately want. With the passage of the Healthy Beverages for Children's Meals bill, the City took an affirmative step to help improve the health and wellness of its children and families without hurting its businesses.

Much like the Baltimore City law, HB 661 successfully strikes a reasonable balance between putting the focus on healthy beverages and safeguarding consumers' right to choose without adding undue burden to the businesses that provide children's meals.

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 661.