



**Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH**  
**Director**

**Department of Health**  
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March 1, 2021

The Honorable Stephen M. Casey  
Chairman  
House Committee on Health and Human Services  
State House  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H 5371 – An Act Relating to Food and Drugs – Healthy Beverage Act

Dear Chairman Casey:

I am writing in support of H 5371, legislation which would create the *Healthy Beverage Act* which would require restaurants that offer children's meals that include a beverage, to provide a healthy beverage as part of the meal.

There is no doubt that sugary drinks increase the risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, gout, and tooth decay. The enactment of H 5371 will discourage excessive consumption of sugary beverages by children and ensure healthy beverage choices as the default option.

One out of every three children in the US is overweight or obese, and the nation spends an estimated \$190 billion a year treating obesity-related health conditions. Increasing consumption of sugary drinks has been a major contributor to the obesity epidemic. A typical 20-ounce soda contains 15-18 teaspoons of sugar and as many as 240 calories. A 64-ounce fountain cola drink can have as many as 700 calories.

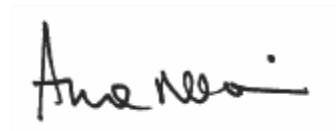
Studies have found a significant link between sugary drink consumption and weight gain in children. One study found that for each additional 12-ounce soda children consume each day, the odds of becoming obese increased by 60% at 18 months of follow-up.

Kids who consume sugary drinks at younger ages tend to be at higher risk of becoming severely obese at an earlier age. Almost 75% of Latino children in the US and more than 80% of Black children have consumed a sugary drink by the time they are two years old, compared to an estimated 45% of non-Latino White children who have consumed a sugary drink before they are six years old.

Latino and Black children are more than twice as likely to be obese than White children, and over-consumption of sugary drinks contributes to this trend.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposed legislation. RIDOH stands willing and able to implement H 5371 after it is enacted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Alexander-Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "N".

for

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH  
Director  
Rhode Island Department of Health

CC:           The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Health & Human Services  
              The Honorable Julie A. Casimiro  
              Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House