



March 31, 2026

The Honorable Melissa Murray
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

SUBJECT: Support for Senate Bill 2113

Dear Chair Murray and Members of the Committee:

The American Heart Association would like to voice support for S. 2113, AN ACT RELATING TO FOOD AND DRUGS – HEALTHY KIDS ACT, by Senator Lauria, and we thank the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony. This important legislation would establish the Healthy Kids Act whereby restaurants would be required to serve a healthy beverage with children’s meals and offer at least two (2) healthy children's meals that meet nutritional standards set forth in the act.

Our lives are busy, and more and more, families are grabbing a meal on the run or eating out. That’s why it is so important that restaurants offer healthy food and beverage options – especially for children. **The majority of children’s meals at the most popular restaurants are unhealthy.** Among children aged 2-11 years, eating at fast food or full-service restaurants is associated with a higher daily intake of calories, saturated fat, sugar, regular soda, and sugary drinks.ⁱ

To help parents, restaurants can make sure children’s meals are healthier. Soda is too high in sugar for kids, yet it is usually the beverage served with children’s meals. Drinking sodas and other sugary drinks is associated with chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes. Milk or water should be the beverage served with children’s meals. Restaurants should also offer more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and make sure meals are not too high in calories, especially from excess fat and salt. **The goal is to help kids see these healthy options as the norm, not the exception.**

Some food service establishments are already making changes:

- Children’s meals with healthier defaults at Walt Disney World theme park restaurants resulted in 21 percent fewer calories compared to meals with unhealthy defaults. Guests accepted the default healthy side dishes 48 percent of the time and healthier beverages 66 percent of the time, even though options, such as French fries and a regular soft drink, were available upon consumer request.ⁱⁱ
- At U.S. McDonald’s restaurants, removing the listing of sodas on the Happy Meal section of menu boards resulted in 21 million more low-fat and fat-free milk jugs and 100 percent apple juice boxes sold over a period of 11 months, compared to the same period a year earlier.ⁱⁱⁱ

- A study published in Obesity found that when the Silver Diner restaurant chain introduced a healthier kids' menu, orders of healthy meals, sides, and beverages increased with no declines in restaurant revenue, suggesting that restaurants can improve nutrition while remaining competitive. Two years later, children's ordering patterns remained healthier than before the menu change and, in some cases, continued to improve.^{iv}

The restaurant industry's voluntary efforts are commendable but do not do enough to ensure that restaurants serve predominantly healthy foods and beverages to children. In a national survey, 68 percent of 8- to 12-year-old children were receptive to receive a fruit or vegetable side dish instead of French fries with their restaurant kids' meal, and 81 percent would receive milk, water, or flavored water instead of soda.^v

Let's increase choice and offer more healthy options for children and parents in our state. Please recommend passage of S. 2113. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ Powell LM, Nguyen BT. Fast-food and full-service restaurant consumption among children and adolescents: effect on energy, beverage, and nutrient intake. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2013; 167(1):14-20, doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2013.417.

ⁱⁱ Peters J, Beck J, Lande J, et al. Using healthy defaults in Walt Disney World restaurants to improve nutritional choices. *JACR*. 2016; 1(1):92-102, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/684364>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Alliance for a Healthier Generation. McDonald's and Alliance for a Healthier Generation Announce Progress on Commitment to Promote Balanced Food and Beverage Choices. Press release. June 25, 2015. <https://www.clintonfoundation.org/press-and-news/alliance-for-a-healthier-generation/mcdonalds-and-alliance-healthier-generation-announce-progress-commitment-promote/>. Accessed July 31, 2018.

^{iv} Anzman-Frasca S, Mueller MP, Sliwa S, et al. Changes in children's meal orders following healthy menu modifications at a regional U.S. restaurant chain. *Obesity*. 2015; 23(5):1055-62, doi: 10.1002/oby.21061.

Anzman-Frasca S, Mueller MP, Lynskey VM, Harellick L, Economos CD. Orders of healthier children's items remain high more than two years after menu changes at a regional restaurant chain. *Health Aff*. 2015; 34(11):1885-92, doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0651

^v Shonkoff ET, Anzman-Frasca S, Lynskey VM, Chan G, Glenn ME, Economos CD. Child and parent perspectives on healthier side dishes and beverages in restaurant kids' meals: results from a national survey in the United States. *BMC Public Health*. 2017; 18(1):56, doi: 10.1186/s12889-017-4610-3