



February 23, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin
United States Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Harkin:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority, I would like to thank you for your leadership in protecting our nation's health. By introducing **S. 651**, the *PLAY Every Day Act*, cosponsored by Senator Clinton, you address one of the most critical issues confronting the public's health in the United States and around the world -- the obesity epidemic.

In our most recent report on obesity, *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America 2006*, we found that obesity rates continued to rise last year in 31 states, and remained dangerously high in 18 other states and the District of Columbia. In the U.S., obesity rates have tripled in children and adolescents over the last 20 years. The health consequences of overweight and obesity, which include increased rates of chronic diseases like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke, are too serious to ignore. The economic consequences are also staggering, with the Department of Health and Human Services estimating that the direct and indirect costs of obesity are over \$117 billion.

One of the "fat factors" that our report identified as a contributor to growing obesity rates among children is the reduction in the amount of physical education, recess and recreation time in schools. Community design can also be a barrier to physical activity. We believe that the development of a "community play index", as outlined in your bill, is an important step toward addressing these barriers and combating the obesity epidemic. While personal behavior is at the center of maintaining healthy levels of diet and exercise, the federal government, states and communities also play a crucial role in fighting the obesity epidemic by making programs and public health interventions available for individuals and families.

Again, I want to commend your leadership and thank you for introducing this very important public health bill. TFAH looks forward to working with you on this and other important public health initiatives in the future. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Richard Hamburg, our Director of Government Relations, at (202) 223-9876 or Jeremy Sharp at (202) 223-9870 x20.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Levi, PhD
Executive Director