



Written Testimony of

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Before the

MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

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HB 521 and HB 525

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My name is Richard Hamburg, and I am delighted to appear today on behalf of Trust for America's Health (TFAH). TFAH is 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.

TFAH has reviewed state statutes aimed at addressing the nation's obesity epidemic and found that legislative solutions like the ones you have proposed are common approaches to controlling and reducing childhood obesity. While there is no definitive research on the success of either school nutrition or physical education programs, we do believe that both are likely to be found effective and therefore offer our support for HB 521 and HB 525.

Today, the United States is confronted with an obesity epidemic that threatens our nation's health, economy and future. Nearly 119 million American adults, or 65 percent of the population, are currently overweight or obese. Even more alarming in terms of long-term health consequences, at least nine million children – one in every seven – are either overweight or obese. The direct and indirect costs of obesity in America are more than \$117 billion per year.

In a report released last October entitled, *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing America*, TFAH found that national and state policies are falling far short of obesity control and reduction goals. The report found that most school food and physical activity programs and policies need more aggressive support and attention, but unfortunately, state policies and actions aimed at obesity are fragmented and inadequate.

In Maryland, medical costs related to obesity in 2003 totaled \$1.533 billion, with state Medicaid costs alone -- \$391 million. Maryland ranks 16<sup>th</sup> highest in medical costs related to obesity per person. The percentage of obese adults is 21.9 percent.

TFAH and the Health Policy Tracking Services at Netscan iPublishing, Inc. recently conducted a survey and review of key aspects of school programs related to nutrition and physical activity. Maryland currently fails to meet three of the five standards, neither -- setting school meal standards above USDA requirements; instituting nutritional standards for competitive foods; nor limiting access to competitive foods.

While Maryland does require physical education in the schools, the requirements are basic at best. Your legislation would expand upon the current law by requiring that each school have a program “meeting the minimum national standards for physical education as established by the

National Association for Sport and Physical Activity.” We support HB 525 and its goal of expanding the availability of physical activity programs in the schools.

A 2001 USDA report found that competitive foods are typically low in nutrients and relatively high in fat, sugars and calories. While students are taught strong nutritional messages, they are “surrounded by vending machines, snack bars, school stores and a’ la carte food with low nutrition,” sending a troubling mixed message about the value of a well-balanced diet.

Under the National School Lunch Program, schools must serve meals that meet the federal governments *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. While school lunches must meet these federal nutritional requirements, decisions about which foods to serve are left to state and local governmental bodies. In this regard, Maryland currently lags far behind a number of states. Already, seventeen states limit access in some way to competitive foods, and four states set nutritional standards for such foods.

HB 521 is aimed at improving the nutritional quality of foods sold outside the realm of federally-sponsored school food programs. Its goal of increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, offering healthy food choices at all school activities and limiting the sale of less healthy foods during school hours is laudable. TFAH supports HB521 and its goal of

sending clear messages to our youth about healthful living. I thank you for the opportunity to present our thoughts here today and offer up a copy of our recent obesity report for the hearing record.