



THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

March 11, 2014

Robin Ziegler  
Chief, Community and School Nutrition Programs Branch  
Maryland State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201

Dear Ms. Ziegler:

Thank you for responding to our inquiries about the Interim Final Rule regarding the federal Smart Snacks Program. We are indeed very interested in viewing the new draft Maryland Management and Operations Memorandum that your department is working on. Since this memorandum is still in draft form, we respectfully request that you consider including some additional items in these new regulations, specifically: increasing participation in wellness committees, improving family access to nutritional information, making available free unlimited water, and reducing chemical additives and sugar in school foods.

We applaud the State's efforts to promote wellness committees and we believe that these committees are valuable to schools, parents and students. We would like to see new regulations that require wellness committees to meet a minimum of four times a year. We would also like to find a way for local community and non-profit organizations that work on issues related to school wellness to participate in the wellness committee process. Lastly, as supporters of transparency and accountability in government, we strongly encourage your department to make information about wellness committees more accessible. Our constituents and our staff have had a difficult time finding information about wellness committees in the state – their membership requirements, the membership of wellness committees in each school district, and information on when the wellness committees meet and whether or not the public is welcome to attend these meetings. We would appreciate any steps that your department can take to make these committees and regulations more transparent.

Over the summer we began hearing from concerned parents of Montgomery County School students about a lack of access to nutritional information about the foods being sold in school cafeterias. After months of advocating for more transparency, the Director of Food and Nutrition Services for the county agreed to make this nutritional information available online. While our constituents are still fighting for nutritional information to be included on school lunch menus, we think the example MCPS has set is a good model for the rest of the state, and we

encourage your department to do what you can to make nutritional information about school lunches and a la carte items available to parents and students in all counties.

One point that we believe we can all easily agree on is increasing access to free, unlimited water. We encourage your department to implement system-wide solutions for easier access to free, unlimited water in cafeterias in addition to providing a water fountain. Students should be able to get a glass of water or easily fill a reusable water bottle to drink as they consume their lunch. Water is always the healthiest beverage available and increasing the availability of water will reduce consumption of sodas, juices and artificially flavored beverages.

Finally, as we learn more about the lifelong health effects of childhood obesity, we encourage your department to take steps to reduce sugar and chemical additives in foods sold in schools. We would like your department to consider a study on setting an upper limit of grams for sugar for foods sold in schools, including 100% juice products based on daily recommended maximum sugar ingestion levels for children set by the American Heart Association. We also request that you department examine the health effects of chemical additives in school foods, particularly those listed under the category of "caution" or "avoid" by the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these ideas. We appreciate all of your hard work to make our schools healthier for kids.

Very truly yours,



Senator Jamie Raskin



Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher