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**Sugar Free Kids Maryland to Focus on Healthy Vending Options**

**During 2016 State Legislative Session**

*Coalition Focuses on Healthy Vending Options*

**BALTIMORE --** Maryland’s leading voice in the fight against childhood obesity and teenage diabetes, Sugar Free Kids, announced Tuesday that it will be proposing the “Maryland Healthy Vending Act” during the 2016 Maryland State Legislative Session. The legislation would make healthier food and drinks more widely available in vending machines on state property.

The bill would also make those options more noticeable in vending machines, require that calorie labels be placed on or around vending machines, encourage water consumption and task the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) with providing technical assistance to procurement officials with monitoring and enforcing the law.

Specifically, 75 percent of the food and drinks offered in vending machines on state property will be required to meet healthy food and drink standards. All snacks must also meet trans fat and sodium standards.

Healthier foods and beverages would have to be displayed in a way that distinguishes from the other items and be placed in vending locations with the highest selling potential.

Plain bottled water would be required to be sold in every vending machine on state property.

“After two years of advocating for a healthier culture for children in the state of Maryland, Sugar Free Kids has become a recognized voice within the state,” said Executive Director Robi Rawl. “We are ready to make a lasting impact in 2016 and it starts with healthier vending options for anyone who lives, works, learns and plays right here in Maryland!”

“This legislation is about giving people choices,” said Michaeline Fedder, Government Affairs Director of the American Heart Association Mid-Atlantic Division. “For those who want to have a healthy snack, it would be there for them. Those who want to buy a cola and a bag of fried chips would still be able to buy those items. This legislation offers options. It doesn’t force anyone to consume anything they don’t want to consume.”

The Horizon Foundation, a lead partner of the coalition, supported Howard County Councilmember Calvin Ball in his successful campaign to pass healthy vending legislation in the summer of 2015. The bill set nutritional standards for foods placed in vending machines in county government buildings.

“Howard County led the way in championing public health by passing healthy vending legislation last summer,” said Nikki Highsmith Vernick, president and CEO of the Horizon Foundation, which supported the bill. “We also support Sugar Free Kids in its mission to improve the health of our entire state.  This bill promotes health and protects choice.  Anyone can buy or eat whatever they like at any time. We are simply making the healthy choice, the easier choice.”

“By making healthier food and drinks more widely available in vending machines, this bill could reduce the burden of diabetes, obesity, and other chronic diseases for people who work and live in Maryland,” said Dr. Richard Bruno, Board of Trustees member at MedChi. “This legislation recognizes that addressing the growing public health crises linked to poor nutrition requires leadership creative approaches.”

Children from lower-income families and children of color are disproportionately affected by obesity and diabetes, and the toll these problems take on children and their families is immense.

“Diseases like obesity and diabetes have been devastating communities of color for too long,” said Gerald Stansbury, president of the NAACP Maryland State Conference. “Our chapter fully supports healthier options to be available where Marylanders live, work, learn and play.”

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**About the American Heart Association:**

*The American Heart Association is devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – America’s No. 1 and No. 4 killers. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The Dallas-based association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. To learn more or to get involved, call 1-800- AHA-USA1, visit heart.org or call any of our offices around the country.*

**About the Horizon Foundation:**

*The Horizon Foundation is an independent philanthropy dedicated to improving the health and wellness of people living or working in Howard County, Maryland. We invest in strategic grants and initiatives to achieve the greatest impact. We also build partnerships and advocate for public policy changes that advance our mission. For more information, visit www.thehorizonfoundation.org.*

**About the Maryland Association of Student Councils**

*The mission of MASC is to foster a statewide environment for all secondary school students to express and exchange opinions and ideas,develop leadership skills, and promote student representation and involvement in all groups and organizations impacting the lives of students. To see that this is done efficiently and effectively, MASC hosts several events throughout the school year. For more information, visit*[*mdstudentcouncils.com*](http://www.mdstudentcouncils.com/)*.*

**About MedChi:**

*MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. It is the largest physician organization in Maryland. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland's foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit* [*www.medchi.org*](http://www.medchi.org)*.*

**About the NAACP:**

*Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest nonpartisan civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities. For more information, visit* [*www.naacpmd.org*](http://www.naacpmd.org)*.*