

**Testimony of the Center for Science in the Public Interest
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Bill 1-22: Eating and Drinking Establishments – Healthy Meals for Children
February 1, 2022**

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) supports Bill 1-22. The bill will support the health of Montgomery County children. If passed, Montgomery County will become the second locality in the nation to pass comprehensive kids' meal legislation. Bill 1-22 ensures that healthier beverages like water, unflavored low-fat milk, and 100% juice and fresh fruit and vegetables are front and center on kids' menus. The bill also guarantees that at least one kids' meal combination on the menu meets expert nutrition standards.

When children eat out, they typically consume more calories, added sugars, and sugary drinks and fewer fruits, vegetables, and whole grains than when they eat at home.¹ Sugary drinks are often automatically included with children's meals, adding unnecessary calories with little or no nutritional benefit.²

Designating particular foods and beverages as children's menu items or bundling them together as children's meals are powerful forms of marketing. This marketing helps to establish norms for children, affecting their preferences and lifelong eating patterns.³

According to the most recent report of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA) advisory committee, consistent scientific evidence demonstrates that diets higher in vegetables, fruits, whole grains and lean meats, and lower in sugar-sweetened drinks, are associated with beneficial outcomes for obesity and associated chronic diseases, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers.⁴ It is critical to optimize diet quality during childhood while children are still forming dietary habits because diet quality tends to decrease with age.⁵

Other states and localities have also turned to public policy to improve restaurant children's meals in their communities. The states of California, Delaware, Hawaii, and Illinois and localities including Baltimore, Cleveland, and Philadelphia, have passed bills that make healthier beverages the automatic option with kids' meals.⁶ In 2020, Prince George's County became the first locality in the country to pass legislation that ensures at least one kids' meal combination meets expert nutrition standards.

Healthier children's meals can reduce sugary drink consumption, encourage children to form healthy eating habits, and support parents' efforts to feed their children well. CSPI urges the Montgomery County Council to join this growing movement by voting in support of Bill 1-22. Thank you in advance for your support of this legislation.

¹ Powell LM, Nguyen BT. Fast-food and Full-service Restaurant Consumption among Children and Adolescents. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2012;167(1):14-20.

² Harris JL, et al. *Fast Food FACTS 2013: Measuring Progress in Nutrition and Marketing to Children and Teens.* Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, 2013. fastfoodmarketing.org/media/FastFoodFACTS_Report.pdf

³ Kraak V, Gootman J, McGinnis JM. *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* Institute of Medicine. 2006. https://zodml.org/sites/default/files/Food_Marketing_to_Children_and_Youth_Threat_or_Opportunity.pdf.

⁴ Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee 2020. Scientific Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee: Advisory Report to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Washington, DC.

⁵ Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee 2020. Scientific Report of the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee: Advisory Report to the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Washington, DC.

⁶ Center for Science in the Public Interest. Chart: State and Local Restaurant Kids' Meal Policies, 2021. <https://cspinet.org/resource/chart-state-and-local-restaurant-kids-meal-policies>