



**Testimony of the American Heart Association
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Montgomery County Council
Bill 1-22, Eating and Drinking Establishments - Healthy Meals for Children
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The American Heart Association supports Bill 1-22, which would be among the most comprehensive healthy kids' meals policies in the nation, making it easier for parents and kids to make healthy choices, and maintaining Montgomery County as a national leader in the fight to promote health equity, reduce health disparities, and ensure everyone has better access to healthier food and beverages.

However, we recommend strengthening the policy to ensure all bundled kids' meals are healthy, or at minimum at least 2 meals on the menu. Limiting menu options to only one healthy choice may still leave too much junk on kids' menus.

Risk Factors in Montgomery County

This is so important given the risk factors faced by too many children in the county:

- 20% of teens in Montgomery County are overweight or obeseⁱ
 - 30% of Latinx teens and 26% of African American teens are overweight or obese, compared to only 12% of white teens

Sadly, these risk factors and negative outcomes extend to adulthood as well:

- Over 1,200 Montgomery County residents died from heart disease in 2016ⁱⁱ
- Almost 300 residents died from stroke
 - Black residents have the highest rates of heart disease and strokeⁱⁱⁱ
- 53% of adults in Montgomery County are overweight or obese
- 25% of adults in the county have high blood pressure.^{iv}
- 67% of county adults don't eat enough fruit and vegetables.^v

A Commonsense Health Policy

Passage and implementation of Bill 1-22 would be another piece of the puzzle to reverse these trends and give parents and kids healthier choices, by ensuring that beverages on kids' meals menus include an automatic option for a healthy drink like water, milk, or 100% fruit juice, and that food items on the children's menu limit sugar, sodium, fat, and calories. It would only apply to bundled restaurant children's meals.

This is a commonsense approach to help all residents make healthier choices. Importantly, **nothing in this law would prevent parents from purchasing less healthy items for a child.** This policy would simply make the healthy choice the easy choice.

The science is clear that reducing consumption of less healthy food and drinks can lessen the risk for unhealthy weight, heart disease, diabetes, and other diet-related

conditions – which are more prevalent among communities of color in the county and around the country. Yes, **this is an issue of health equity and social justice**. Everyone should have access to healthy food and be able to make healthier choices.

The Evidence and Rationale is Clear

This policy is so necessary, since the research tells us:

- When kids eat out, they consume more calories, sugar, fat, and sodium than when eating at home and **over 1/3 of kids consume fast food each day**.^{vi}
 - On days when they eat from fast food restaurants, children consume an extra 126 calories and adolescents an extra 309 calories.
 - Eating at full-service restaurants is associated with increases of 160 calories per day for children and 267 calories for adolescents.
- Among US children aged 2-18, 35% of daily calories from added sugars and solid fats comes from fast food restaurants.
 - Sugary drinks, dairy-based desserts, French fries, and pizza are the top contributors of these empty calories.
- Many **kids are consuming 10 times the recommended amount of added sugar**.
 - The American Heart Association recommends children consume no more than one eight-ounce sugary drink each week.^{vii}
 - Kids consume 30 gallons of sugary drinks each year on average, enough to fill a bathtub!^{viii}
- In addition to weight gain, **excess consumption of added sugars, especially from sugary drinks, raises the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and tooth decay**^{ix}
 - Increasing sugary drink consumption by one serving per day increases the risk of hypertension by 8% and the risk of heart disease by 17%
 - Each additional serving of sugary drinks per day increases the risk of type 2 diabetes by 13-18%. Over 10 years, about two million type 2 diabetes cases in the US are attributable to consumption of sugary beverages.
- **Sugary drinks like sports drinks, energy drinks, and soda are the leading source of added sugar in the American diet, and communities of color are disproportionately targeted in marketing**, resulting in significant health disparities and health inequities.^x
- Black and Latinx teens see more ads for fast food than any other category of junk food and drinks^{xi}

- Fast food and other restaurants accounted for 50% of Black-targeted TV ad spending in 2017.
- Fast food and other restaurants accounted for 49% of Spanish-language TV ad spending in 2017.
- 91% of parents reported purchasing meals for their child in the past week at one of the four largest fast-food restaurants, on average twice per week.^{xii}
 - However, nearly all **parents said they would purchase fast food for their child more often because of a restaurant's healthier kids' meal policy.**

Montgomery can lead the nation

The data and health benefits provide clear rationale for this family friendly public health policy. Additionally, **Montgomery can join our neighbors in Prince George's as the national standard by implementing one of the most comprehensive and impactful kids' meals policies in the country.** Several states and cities including Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, and Delaware have taken smaller steps by making healthy drinks the default on kids' meals menus, but we can and must do more.^{xiii}

Strengthening, passing and implementing Bill 1-22 will show the rest of the country that the Montgomery County Council is putting kids first and creating a more equitable community that allows everyone to make healthier choices through a comprehensive children's meals policy that covers both food and beverages.

As is so often the case, this Council has the opportunity to lead the nation and put the health and wellbeing of our kids above all else. The American Heart Association encourages the Council to strengthen and pass Bill 1-22, ensure all kids' meals are healthier, and make the healthy choice the easy choice in Montgomery County.

ⁱ <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/Resources/Files/Reports/PopHealthReportFINAL.pdf>

ⁱⁱ https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/2016_Annual_Report.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.healthymontgomery.org/index.php?module=Indicators&controller=index&action=view&indicatorId=56&localeId=1259>

^{iv} <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS/Resources/Files/Reports/PopHealthReportFINAL.pdf>

^v <https://mocofoodcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/MoCo-Food-Access-Report-2015.pdf>

^{vi} <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/healthy-kids-meals-9.28.2020.pdf>

^{vii} <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/img/Fast-Facts/sugary-drink-fast-facts-january-2020.pdf>

^{viii} <https://newsroom.heart.org/news/american-academy-of-pediatrics-and-american-heart-association-endorse-suite-of-policies-to-reduce-kids-consumption-of-sugary-drinks>

^{ix} <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/sugary-drink-fast-facts-9.28.2020.pdf>

^x http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/Sugary_Drink_FACTS_Full%20Report.pdf

^{xi} <http://uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/TargetedMarketingReport2019.pdf>

^{xii} <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/healthierkidsmeals>

^{xiii} https://cspinet.org/sites/default/files/attachment/CSPI_chart_local_kids_meal_policies_November_2021.pdf