

Testimony to Support Bill 1-22

I am Dr. Yolandra Hancock, a pediatrician, a public health advocate, and most importantly, a mother. I want to thank Councilmember Rice for his dedication to the children of Montgomery County by sponsoring this critical piece of legislation. As we have navigated through this pandemic, our children have paid the ultimate price. Over ten million have acquired COVID-19, nearly 36,000 have been hospitalized, and 807 children that we know of have lost their lives. For those either hospitalized or dying from COVID, a study in the journal Pediatrics demonstrated that leading chronic diseases associated with severity of COVID infections included obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, with children of color disproportionately impacted by both COVID and chronic diseases where they make up over 50% of COVID-19 hospitalizations and over 60% of COVID-19 related deaths. Clearly, something must be done. When the risk of getting severely ill from and/or dying from COVID is intricately tied to diet-related diseases, now is the time to take swift action. Passing Bill 1-22 does just that. By establishing specific guidelines for children's meals and beverages, this policy facilitates the healthy choice being the easy choice and provides healthier options for busy parents like myself to choose from. According to the CDC, over 33% of our children eat fast food on a given day. As a pediatrician, I would love this number to be lower but, as a working mother, I fully understand the demands on families' time and the necessary convenience of eating out. It is our collective responsibility, as parents, policy makers, and community members, inclusive of small and large food establishments, to create the healthiest environment possible so that each of our children can reach their full health potential as we come out of this pandemic. It will be argued that this legislation puts additional burden on food establishments recovering from the pandemic. I would counter by asking, what price is too much to protect our children's health as they recover? Please vote in favor of Bill 1-22. Thank you.

References:

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db375-h.pdf>
2. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/149/1/e2021053418/183463/Risk-Factors-for-Severe-COVID-19-in-Children?searchresult=1>
3. <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/children-and-covid-19-state-level-data-report/>
4. <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/148/5/e2021052273/181338/Deaths-in-Children-and-Adolescents-Associated-With?searchresult=1>