



WalkBoston

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Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education in support of H 483 An Act Relative to Student Nutrition and Wellness

Good morning, my name is Wendy Landman and I am the Executive Director of WalkBoston, a pedestrian advocacy organization that promotes walking throughout Massachusetts for transportation, health and vibrant communities. We are very pleased to come to you today in the company of many advocates for healthy children and hope that our collective testimony will help to build your support for H483.

I am here to speak specifically to the element of the act that calls for school district wellness policies to include Safe Routes to School programs (SRTS). Children who walk or bike to school are engaging in physical activities that contribute to their health and well-being - both in terms of physical fitness and readiness to learn when they arrive at school. SRTS programs provide benefits for health, safety, transportation, education, community livability, and the environment. Across the country, states are undertaking the programs and capital projects required to increase the number of children walking and biking to school. Excellent results are being achieved in communities ranging from Arlington, MA to Marin County, CA.

In the 1960s, more than 60% of American children walked or biked to school. Today, the figure is approximately 10%. This change has profound impacts:

- There are more than three times as many overweight children today as there were 25 years ago.¹
- As much as 20% or more of morning rush hour traffic is school related.²
- Children in the U.S. average more than an hour a day as passengers in cars and have lost the opportunity to discover their communities and build a sense of independence and responsibility.

The basic goals of SRTS programs are to:

- Increase the number of Massachusetts' children walking and bicycling to school, and walking or bicycling for other trips that they make;
- Make the journey to and from school safer; and
- Reduce traffic congestion associated with the journey to school

Important benefits of walking and biking include:

- Increasing children's physical activity (and thus reducing the incidence of chronic disease over the long term);
- Improving children's sense of independence and mastery of their environment;
- Enhancing the sense of community for Massachusetts cities and towns;
- Reducing expenditures for busing; and
- Reducing auto emissions.

Including SRTS as one component of school wellness policies is an important means to add to children's physical activity outside the school day. SRTS programs are good for children and for all members of the community because they help create communities that support active living.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

² National Highway Traffic Safety Administration