

H. 483 An Act Relative to Student Nutrition and Wellness

Sponsor: Rep. Kay Khan

The Problem: Obesity & Health

- One third of children in Massachusetts ages two to five are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight; statistics reflect that close to 10% of Massachusetts teenagers are obese.
- Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults and will experience the same health risk factors as overweight adults such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, type II diabetes and increased risk of heart disease.
- Since 1996 when the Massachusetts Board of Education eliminated the mandated minimum hours of physical education instruction, the percentage of students participating in rigorous physical activity has fallen dramatically.
- According to the *2003 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey*, one third of students do not participate in a physical education class during an average week and all measures of physical activity have decreased with each grade level.
- Nationwide obesity is not only a problem for Americans' health, but also a problem for their wallets. Annually, medical expenses resulting from obesity total \$117 billion nation-wide. For youth aged six to seventeen, obesity-associated annual hospital costs increased more than threefold; from \$35 million during 1979-1981 to \$127 million during 1997-1999.

2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act

- The new federal requirements obligate schools which participate in federal reimbursement programs (school lunch, school breakfast, summer food services and after school snacks) to create and adopt district wide school wellness policies.
- As required by the new federal law, a local wellness policy, at a minimum, shall include:
 - goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities that are designed to promote student wellness;
 - Nutrition guidelines selected by the local educational agency for all foods available on each school campus under the local educational agency during the school day with the objectives of promoting student health and reducing childhood obesity;
 - Guidelines for reimbursable school meal, a plan for measuring implementation of the local wellness policy.

Need for Legislation in Massachusetts

The new federal law takes an important first step in teaching our children to lead healthier lives, but falls short of creating a long term sustainable change in school nutrition. The federal law lacks effective oversight and enforcement mechanisms and provides no infrastructure for continued community involvement. Though there are many legislative proposals which address school nutrition, none of them establish a framework for systematic community involvement and shared responsibility. Simply removing vending machines from schools or setting nutritional standards for the food offered in schools does not teach children and their community how to live and sustain a health life.

Bill Summary

- H. 483 expands the responsibility for student nutrition and wellness to the entire community. It engages both the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in the establishment of standards and approval of local communities' wellness policies.
- The entire local community, not just a narrow insular group as is currently the practice, would share the responsibility for establishing a school wide wellness policy.
- School districts would be called on to create School Wellness Advisory Committees made up of parents, teachers, students, administrators, school committee members, school nurses, food services managers, physicians, nutritionists and other interested community members. Together, the members of this committee would create a wellness policy based on both federal and state requirements.
- Through the School Wellness Advisory Committees, school districts would be required keep pace with advancing science and technology by regularly updating their wellness policies and resubmitting them for state approval.