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Testimony for Bill 18-564, the "Healthy Schools Act of 2009"
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I'm honored to be here this afternoon, and congratulate Councilwoman Mary Cheh and her staff on developing the excellent and much-needed Healthy Schools Act. The Center for Science in the Public Interest has been working on national nutrition policy and education for almost 40 years, but we also recognize the importance of thinking locally about how to improve public health here at home in D.C. We have more than 2,000 members and subscribers to our *Nutrition Action Healthletter* here in the District, and believe that our nation's capital should be a leader in raising the bar for school standards on health and wellness.

We strongly support Councilwoman Cheh's Healthy Schools Act. The bill is comprehensive and would result in improvements needed within D.C. schools to help children develop healthy habits during childhood.

Childhood obesity rates have tripled over the last two decades. In 2009, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that a third (35%) of D.C. children are overweight or obese. Not only are obese kids more likely to become obese adults, but they also show signs of chronic disease when still young. 60% of overweight children as young as ages 5 to 10 years old have high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, or other early warning sign for heart disease. Type 2 diabetes can no longer be called "adult-onset" diabetes, because it's affecting so many kids.

In 2004, Congress required that all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program adopt a Local Wellness Policy. CSPI worked with D.C. Hunger Solutions and D.C. Action for Healthy Kids to help D.C. public schools draft its local wellness policy. Experts consider D.C.'s policy one of the strongest in the country.

Significant progress has been made to implement this policy. As documented in a progress report from D.C. Hunger Solutions, D.C. Public Schools have hired a P.E. teacher for almost all schools in the District. The food service provider Chartwell's has reduced saturated fat and increased whole grains, fruits, and vegetables in their meals.

However, dissemination of the policy to school administrators, school nurses, PTA, parents and others has not been accomplished. In fact, according to the CDC, only 45 percent of principals in the District, when asked, had a copy of the "wellness policy." The D.C. Healthy Schools Act will address gaps in the LWP implementation by increasing schools' accountability for compliance with the policy, creating incentives for schools with strong wellness practices, and providing the funding needed for schools to implement some of the important provisions of the bill.

While we strongly support this legislation, we hope that the Council will consider strengthening the bill to protect children's health throughout the extended school day. We urge you to remove the exemption for the policy to apply to after-school events (Title II, Section 207 (b)(3)), which as the bill is written would allow junk-foods to be sold or provided during afterschool care and

events. Junk foods don't suddenly become less harmful to children's health after the last school bell rings. Any event on school grounds should support healthy eating for children, sending a consistent message that healthy eating is important.

We strongly support the food marketing provisions of the bill (Title II, Section 207 (g)). Four out of five food ads aimed at kids are for sugary cereals, snack foods, candy, soft drinks, and fast food. Junk-food marketing is prevalent in schools. According to the Federal Trade Commission, marketing in schools is the third-largest category of marketing expenditures to children, with \$186 million spent in a year. In schools, children are a captive audience, where parents are not present to guide their children's food choices or mitigate the influence of marketing.

The DC Healthy Schools Act not only would limit junk-food marketing in schools, it would promote healthy foods and lifestyles. Initiatives like schools gardens, local produce weeks, and health education help make eating healthy a desirable activity and get kids active in learning where their food comes from and how to make healthy food taste great.

We thank Councilwoman Cheh for recognizing that healthy children learn better, develop positive habits for life, and become healthier adults. Making schools healthier not only benefits the children's performance now, but is an important way to address high health care costs and is a crucial investment in D.C.'s future workforce. Kids in the classroom now are the doctors, teachers, and Councilmembers of tomorrow, and we should provide them with a healthy start. Thank you for your time.