



State of Louisiana
Department of Health and Hospitals
Office of the Secretary

March 13, 2012

The Honorable John A. Alario, Jr., President
Louisiana State Senate
P.O. Box 94183, Capitol Station
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9183

The Honorable David Heitmeier, Chairman
Senate Health and Welfare Committee
P.O. Box 94183, Capitol Station
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9183

RE: Senate Resolution 134 of the 2011 Regular Session

Dear President Alario and Senator Heitmeier:

Senate Resolution 134 (SR 134) of the 2011 Regular Session charged the Department of Health and Hospitals' (DHH) Office of Public Health (OPH), the Louisiana Council on Obesity Prevention and Management (Obesity Council), and the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (GCPFS) to report to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare the status of ongoing efforts to curb the high prevalence of childhood obesity in Louisiana. This correspondence serves as DHH's response to SR 134.

The prevalence of childhood obesity is a public health challenge in Louisiana. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2009, Louisiana had the second highest rate of obesity in the nation. During the 2009 academic school year, height and weight were measured on approximately 16,057 children aged 2-19 years old who were seen in school based health centers in Louisiana. According to data analysis conducted by the OPH Adolescent School Health Program, 43.44% of these children were overweight or obese. Obesity is a serious health threat as it has been linked to gallstones, liver problems, heart disease, congestive heart failure, stroke, high blood cholesterol and blood pressure, diabetes, and even some types of cancer.

DHH is working to implement several evidence-based strategies to combat childhood obesity, which are described in detail below. DHH is also engaging with community stakeholders, including the Pennington Biomedical Research Center, a world-renowned research institution, to implement initiatives that encourage and enable Louisianans to take a more proactive role in improving their health. But despite all of these efforts, no real progress has been made to reduce the rate of childhood obesity in the state. Obesity rates have continued to increase dramatically, putting more children at risk for preventable illnesses and early death, as well as leading to higher health expenditures. DHH strongly urges the legislature to take an aggressive approach to fighting childhood obesity. The department is reminding children they can "own their own health" by making more nutritious food choices and exercising, every day. Innovative initiatives and creative public policy approaches are vital to improving health outcomes for our children and ensuring they lead long, healthy lives.

Currently, DHH-OPH, the Obesity Council, and the GCPFS are working to implement initiatives that increase physical activity, increase consumption of healthier foods, and decrease television viewing, as described below, in an effort to reduce the number of obese children in the state.

- **Increase physical activity** – In Louisiana, approximately 34% of children and youth ages 6-17 participate in vigorous physical activity that meets current federal physical activity guidelines. In line with the recommendations outlined in the Pennington Biomedical Research Center's *Louisiana's Report Card on Physical Activity and Health for Children and Youth*, DHH will work to increase the proportion of children and youth who participate in vigorous physical activity by 40% over the current baseline. DHH is implementing initiatives to help reach this goal by:
 - Implementing *Bayou Health*. On February 1, 2012, DHH launched the single biggest transformation in Louisiana Medicaid since the inception of the program in the 1960s – *Bayou Health*. This coordinated care model has been successfully used in other states to manage care, improve patient outcomes, and ensure that the money spent on health care yields high quality outcomes. Medicaid recipients will choose health plan coverage with one of five highly qualified plans. Each of the health plans will offer incentives for recipients to maintain chronic conditions, get preventive care, eat healthier, and exercise.
 - Implementing *Living Well in Louisiana*. This state of the art web-based program will allow Louisianans (adults and children) to track their exercise against individualized goals, challenge others in meeting fitness and nutritional goals, and get important information on exercising and healthier eating. *Living Well in Louisiana* improves upon and will take the place of *Lighten Up Louisiana*, one of the GCPFS' most popular programs.
 - Sponsoring the annual Elementary Fitness Meet, an Olympic-style statewide fitness competition that involves thousands of children across the state competing in seven fitness categories. The GCPFS is the only state entity that offers a fitness competition for schools.
 - Sponsoring *Tour de Fitness* workshops throughout the state, through the GCPFS. These workshops are designed to provide training, teaching strategies, authentic assessment, and best practice information to K-12 teachers in the areas of physical education and health to promote youth health and obesity prevention.
 - Implementing *Fuel Up to Play 60* (FUTP 60) in over 800 schools across the state, through the Obesity Council. FUTP 60 is a school wellness activation kit to inspire kids to “get up and play” for 60 minutes a day and “fuel up” with the food groups kids don't get enough of—low-fat and fat-free dairy foods, fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
 - Adding physical activity guidelines to state regulations for licensed child-care centers. The Obesity Council is working with the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to add guidelines that would provide for 60 minutes of age appropriate physical activity for children in child-care centers.
 - Implementing the NAP SACC (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment in Child Care) program. The Obesity Council, the DHH-OPH Maternal and Child

Health Program, and the LSU School of Public Health have implemented this program in 18 child care centers across the state, and the goal is to implement NAP SACC in child care centers statewide in the next five years.

- This program is designed to enhance child-care center environments by increasing the physical activity of children, improving the nutritional quality of food and beverages served, and improving staff-child interactions.
- Establishing school health advisory councils and school wellness policies. The Obesity Council and the Department of Education, Pennington, the Picard Center, and the Louisiana School Boards Association worked with local school boards to establish 25 school health advisory councils in the state, in accordance with Act 286 of the 2009 regular session.
- The purpose of a school health advisory council is to advise a local school board on implementation of school wellness policies and programs to impact physical activity for students, physical and health education, nutrition, and overall student health.
- Utilizing federal Community Transformation Grant (CTG) funds to:
 - Hire a chronic disease director in DHH-OPH. This individual will be tasked with implementing initiatives that will focus on wide-ranging policy, programmatic, and infrastructure changes to impact chronic diseases, like obesity.
 - Implement programs in schools and child care centers that:
 - Require and improve physical activity/education programs.
 - Increase extracurricular physical activity.
- **Increase consumption of healthy foods** – According to the Pennington report card, there is little or no data available on the dietary patterns of younger children in Louisiana. This is a serious limitation of the current health surveillance system for children in Louisiana. Data does show that 9.7 % of adolescents in the state in grades 9-12 eat three or more servings of vegetables a day, and 3.5 % of adolescents in grades 9-12 consume four or more servings of fruit per day. In line with Pennington's report card, DHH will work to achieve an increase in the intake of fruits and vegetables in the diets of adolescents by 40% over the current baseline. DHH is also working to implement initiatives to increase healthy eating for younger children. DHH is working to reach these goals by:
 - Establishing healthy standard food guidelines for all DHH facilities.
 - DHH is in a unique position to make a difference by modeling healthful nutrition and adopting food purchasing and preparation policies in our own facilities that promote healthy lifestyles.
 - The DHH healthy food guidelines for DHH facilities will eliminate fried foods and increase the amount of whole grains, fruits and vegetables that are served.

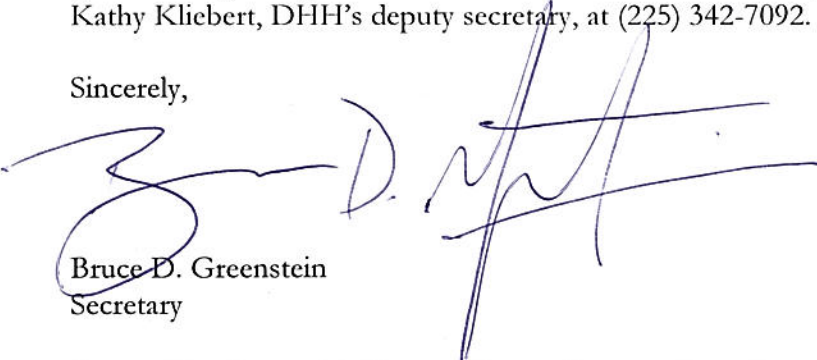
- Establishing healthy standard food guidelines for all of the state's hospitals.
 - DHH is working with the LSU Health Sciences Center and the Louisiana Hospital Association to adopt healthy food guidelines that would eliminate fried foods and increase the amount of whole grains, fruits and vegetables that are served in all of the state's hospitals.
 - The healthy foods in hospitals initiative also includes a partnership with Nicholls State University to develop a culinary arts and nutrition program for students and people cooking in health care institutions.
- Establishing a thorough list of beverages and foods that may be sold on public elementary, secondary and high school grounds, in association with Pennington.
- Reducing sugar sweetened beverage consumption and promoting water intake through CTG grant initiatives.
- Increasing breastfeeding through the Louisiana Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) and the Maternal and Child Health Program. Research has shown the many health benefits of breastfeeding. Breastfed babies are on average 14 pounds lighter in adolescence when compared with their formula-fed siblings.¹
 - The WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program counsels moms on how to make different breastfeeding strategies work for them.
 - WIC clinics provide breast pumps to mothers needing assistance with breastfeeding.
 - WIC helps Louisiana businesses increase community support for breastfeeding and create breastfeeding-friendly worksites.
 - Guided Infant Feeding Techniques (GIFT) is a breastfeeding certification program that supports Louisiana hospitals in implementing evidence-based practices for infant feeding and maternal and infant bonding. GIFT is a joint effort between the OPH-Maternal and Child Health Program, the Louisiana Maternal and Child Health Coalition, and the Louisiana Perinatal Commission. There are currently 18 "GIFT certified" birthing facilities in the state.
- Increasing the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables through the WIC Farmers Market Program. This program provides coupons to a limited number of WIC participants in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport to purchase fruits and vegetables at local farmers' markets. The most recent redemption rate of these coupons at Louisiana farmers' markets was 49.6%. This redemption rate is up from previous years, which saw only a 25% redemption rate.
- Providing nutritional counseling through the WIC program for current and expectant mothers.

¹ *Breastfeeding in the Fight Against Obesity*. Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University
<http://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/publications/newsletter/iprn1010/research-metzger.html>

- Implementing *Bayou Health* (see above).
 - Implementing *Living Well in Louisiana* (see above).
 - Sponsoring *Tour de Fitness* workshops (see above).
 - Implementing *Fuel Up to Play 60* (see above).
 - Implementing the NAP SACC program (see above).
 - Establishing school health advisory councils and school wellness policies (see above).
- **Decrease television viewing** – According to Pennington's report card, there are a limited number of data sources that examine television viewing of children in Louisiana. The data does show that 40.3% of adolescents in Louisiana in grades 9-12 exceed limits for watching TV and videos or playing video games. In line with Pennington's report card, DHH will work to decrease television viewing for adolescents who exceed recommended limits for screen time by 40% over the current baseline. DHH will work to meet this goal as well as decrease television viewing for children by:
 - Adding television-viewing guidelines to state regulations for licensed child-care centers. The Obesity Council is working with the Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to add guidelines that would limit screen time to 60 minutes per day for children over age 2 (screen time would be prohibited for children under age 2).
 - Reducing screen time for adolescents and children through CTG grant initiatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to report on our efforts to increase healthy behaviors to ensure a healthier generation of Louisianans. DHH is dedicated to working with the legislature and public and private stakeholders to address the problem of childhood obesity. Should you have any questions regarding the information contained in this correspondence, please feel free to contact Ms. Kathy Kliebert, DHH's deputy secretary, at (225) 342-7092.

Sincerely,


Bruce D. Greenstein
Secretary

Cc: The Honorable Sharon Weston Broome, State Senator, District 15
The Honorable Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee
David R. Poynter Legislative Research Library