

TO: The Honorable Delores Kelley, Chairman
Members, Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Shawn McIntosh
Executive Director, Sugar Free Kids Maryland

DATE: February 3, 2022

RE: **SUPPORT** – Senate Bill 263 – *Health - Food Service Facilities - Beverage Options With Children's Meals*



Sugar Free Kids Maryland urges your support of SB 263. As a coalition of over 250 member organizations committed to the reduction of sugar consumption to reduce the prevalence of chronic disease, tooth decay and unhealthy weight in children and families, Sugar Free Kids Maryland recognizes the important role healthy options in children's restaurant meals can play in reinforcing essential health behaviors.

This legislation would require restaurant children's menus to have a default drink of milk, juice, or water. This does not mean that a child cannot have a soda, but that the parent would have to request the soda, rather than request a healthy beverage. Essentially, it puts the choice for whether a child drinks a sugary drink into the parents' hands.

In 2017, Baltimore City was the first jurisdiction to pass this type of legislation on the East Coast. In 2020, Prince George's County was the first jurisdiction in the nation to pass a healthy kids' meal bill that included requirements for a full, healthy meal option. Maryland could strengthen this legislation by adding a meal component. However, Sugar Free Kids Maryland is supportive of passing the legislation, as it stands, if that means that children will have healthy beverages served with their meals. Sugary drinks are the leading contributor to unhealthy weights in children.

Like the rest of the nation, nearly 2/3 of adults in Maryland are overweight or obese and nearly a third of all children are the same. The United Health Foundation estimates that over 15% of all children from low-income Maryland homes are obese. If Maryland is truly committed to reversing the trend of obesity and ensuring that our most vulnerable children grow up to be healthy adults, then we must begin making healthy options more readily available.

Sugar Free Kids Maryland urges your support of this vital bill. By making the healthy choice the easy choice, Maryland can continue to build a culture of health for our children.