



March 3rd, 2025

Testimony of Laura Hale
American Heart Association

Favorable HB 1469 Taxes - Sugary Beverage Distributor Tax (For Our Kids Act)

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. The American Heart Association extends its strong support for HB 1469 For Our Kids Act. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association.

To put it simply, this legislation is a win for kids, a win for families, and a win for Maryland. We all know sugary drinks are not good for our health. They increase the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and dental cavities in adults as well. It is estimated that almost 10% of Maryland's population has type 2 diabetes, and another 33% has prediabetes. Artificial sugars also threaten our health as they have been associated with an increased risk of stroke¹.

As we continue to look at a tough budget year, we know that Medicaid costs will continue to rise due to diseases caused by the consumption of sugary drinks. We can't cut our way out of the cost concerns with Medicaid, but we can prevent it. This legislation will decrease sugary drink consumption, increase health, and raise needed revenue for the state.

Let's invest in Maryland's future and pour health back into our communities. HB 1469 presents us with a vital family-forward economic, educational and health opportunity. The legislation will raise revenue, which would be directed toward healthy school meals for all and the childcare scholarship program. So that Maryland children—regardless of household income—can access the nutritious meals they need to focus, learn, and succeed in school.

Studies show that when students have access to healthy school meals, their academic performance improves—they concentrate better, leading to greater success. Absenteeism declines—students who eat nutritious meals are sick less often and miss fewer school days. Lastly, behavior improves—reducing hunger and ensuring stable nutrition can lead to better classroom engagement and fewer disciplinary issues.

No child should have to learn on an empty stomach. By passing HB 1469, Maryland can take a major step toward ensuring every child in the state has the nutrition they need to thrive.

¹ [Artificially Sweetened Beverages and Stroke, Coronary Heart Disease, and All-Cause Mortality in the Women's Health Initiative | Stroke](#)

The science is clear: sugary drinks are a leading contributor to chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and dental cavities. These unhealthy drinks are the single largest source of added sugar in young people's diets. Research from the American Heart Association shows that children who regularly consume sugary drinks are at significantly higher risk for these conditions, increasing their chances of lifelong health problems.

This policy is not untested. Similar taxes have already been implemented in cities like Philadelphia, Berkeley, and Seattle, and in more than 80 countries around the world.

Maryland is facing an important choice; we can choose to cut programs and turn away from the programs we care about or we can make a choice [For Our Kids](#) and invest in Maryland. The American Heart Association urges a favorable report on HB 1469.