



111 Michigan Ave NW
Washington, DC 20010-2916
ChildrensNational.org

**Testimony of Qadira Malika Ali, MD, MPH
Attending Pediatrician, Children's Health Center – THEARC
Medical Director, Family Lifestyle Program Produce Prescription Initiative
Children's National Hospital**

**HB 1469: Taxes - Sugary Beverage Distributor Tax (For Our Kids Act)
Position: FAVORABLE
March 6, 2025
House Ways and Means Committee**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 1469. My name is Qadira Malika Ali, MD, MPH, and I am a pediatrician at Children's National Hospital. Children's National has been serving the nation's children since 1870. Nearly 60% of our patients are residents of Maryland, and we maintain a network of community-based pediatric practices, surgery centers and regional outpatient centers in Maryland. Emerging from an early partnership with YMCA and the American Heart Association, the Family Lifestyle Program (FLiP) at Children's National aims to address food insecurity and diet-related chronic disease risk through an innovative clinical community collaborative model. FLiP promotes holistic healthy lifestyles for families with children in the DC area by community resource linkage, produce prescription and culinary and nutrition education.

As a community-based pediatrician working closely with children and families living in Maryland, I care for children from their first bites until their first college classes. I have seen firsthand the worsening trend of diet-related chronic diseases. Many of my patients struggle with conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes, and dental decay – conditions that are increasingly prevalent at younger ages due to poor nutrition. One of the most significant contributors to this crisis is the overconsumption of sugary beverages. The *For Our Kids Act* is a necessary step toward reducing this harm, encouraging healthier choices, and improving public health outcomes.

In my clinical practice over the years, dedicated parents and kids alike have lamented the difficulty of making healthy eating choices stick at home. Despite how much nutrition counseling and goal setting we accomplish in clinic, kids and families live their lives within their

communities. Unfortunately, some communities, like those in low-income areas or those with majority residents of color, are beset with more concentrated unhealthy food outlets than others. This unhealthy food map mirrors the concentration of chronic disease.¹ The environments children grow up in strongly influence their lifelong health, and legislation such as the *For Our Kids Act* help shift the balance toward healthier norms.

In my practice, I work with families who want to make better nutritional choices but face systemic barriers, including the affordability and accessibility of healthier alternatives. My role extends beyond clinical care – I run a produce prescription program that promotes *Food as Medicine*, helping families incorporate fresh, whole foods into their diets. While programs like these are effective, they must be supported by broader policy changes that make it easier for families to choose health over harm. Research has shown that taxing sugary beverages leads to a decline in their consumption, particularly among young people, while generating revenue that can be reinvested in nutrition programs and community health initiatives.

This bill is not about restricting choice – it is about addressing the public health crisis that is costing Maryland kids and families their health and well-being. By making sugary drinks less financially attractive, we can encourage long-term shifts toward healthier habits. When paired with education and increased access to healthier options, such as subsidized fruits and vegetables, this policy has the potential to create a lasting positive impact on our children's future.

I applaud Delegate Shetty and Chair Peña-Melnyk for introducing this important legislation and I urge you to support the *For Our Kids Act* for the sake of Maryland's children and families. Investing in policies that promote better health today will lead to stronger, healthier communities tomorrow. I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 1469. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

For more information, please contact:

Austin Morris, Government Affairs Manager
almorris@childrensnational.org

¹ Cooksey-Stowers, K., Schwartz, M. B., & Brownell, K. D. (2017, November 14). *Food swamps predict obesity rates better than food deserts in the United States*. International journal of environmental research and public health. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5708005/>