

SB866: Public Health - Chain Restaurants - Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons

Senate Finance Committee | February 25, 2026

SUPPORT

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Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I write today in support of SB866, as a daughter who lost her father in September to a long battle with type 2 diabetes and kidney failure. This bill would require the Maryland Department of Health to require chain restaurants operating more than 20 businesses to display certain icons next to menu items with a high added sugars content or high sodium content on each menu or menu board beginning January 1, 2028. This small change would make an incredibly large impact for those dealing with health issues that cause them to monitor their sodium or added sugar intake.

My dad's history with kidney failure was a bit more traumatic than others. Until he was ultimately put on dialysis in 2023 following a heart attack -- we, as a family, spent four years intensely monitoring his sodium intake to try and manage how much fluid his body would retain. Where some individuals might experience fluid overload as a bit of shortness of breath and the need for more than their regularly prescribed diuretics, my dad suffered from a relatively rare condition called flash pulmonary edema. Whenever his body started to become fluid overloaded, within seconds, his lungs would fill completely with fluid, and my mom and I would be praying that the at-home oxygen was enough to sustain him until the paramedics arrived. This resulted in many weeks-long hospital visits and scary moments of uncertainty.

My mom and I spent those four years cooking nearly every meal at home so that we could monitor my dad's sodium and fluid intake in an effort to prevent these "episodes" from happening. However, sometimes there are days when you're too tired to cook, or maybe you want to go out and celebrate a birthday, anniversary, or promotion at work, and you venture out to a restaurant. Having the high sodium and sugar content indicators available on menus would have been incredibly helpful in my dad's journey -- not just for his health and safety, but also for peace of mind and the ability to make informed decisions.

No one wants to be forced to order a salad with grilled chicken without salt every single time they go out to eat just to be "safe." By requiring the high sodium and sugar content indicators for menu items at chain restaurants, Maryland would be aiding people like my dad to be able to feel a bit of normalcy amidst their various health journeys. This small change will have an immeasurable impact.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable report on SB866.

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