



February 18, 2026

Testimony of Laura Hale

American Heart Association

Support of SB 866 Public Health - Chain Restaurants - Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Honorable Members of the Finance Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association offers our strong support of SB 866.

Excess sodium raises blood pressure, increasing the risk of heart disease and stroke, which are the leading causes of death in Maryland¹. One in three adult Marylanders already has hypertension, also known as high blood pressure.² Excess added sugars contributes to heart disease, obesity, and Type 2 diabetes³.

People often do not realize how much sodium and added sugars are in meals from restaurants. One study found that 90% of participants underestimated the levels of sodium in their food.⁴ This means that people are worsening their health without even realizing it. While some nutrition information is widely available, getting sodium and added sugars information can require reading dense PDFs from restaurant websites, which just isn't practical when standing in line to order.

Fortunately, there is a proven solution. SB 866 would follow the successes of similar bills to inform diners of menu items that contain more than 50% of the daily suggested limit of sodium or added sugars. This law only applies to chain restaurants, many of which have already implemented these information labels elsewhere in the country. We do not expect any fiscal note.

We know that informed dining works. We know this because that's what the research tells us, and because we've seen similar bills succeed in New York City and Philadelphia. Separate randomized control trials showed that people who are provided with information labels regarding sodium and added sugars choose to avoid those items compared with people who are not provided with labels^{5,6}.

The American Heart Association urges a swift and favorable report on SB 866.

¹ <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/heart/pages/about.aspx>

² [Microsoft Word - BRFSS BRIEF 2017-04 Hypertension](#)

³ [Relationship between Added Sugars Consumption and Chronic Disease Risk Factors: Current Understanding - PMC](#)

⁴ [Consumer underestimation of sodium in fast food restaurant meals: results from a cross-sectional observational study - PMC](#)

⁵ [Online Randomized Controlled Trials of Restaurant Sodium Warning Labels - PubMed](#)

⁶ [Online RCT of Icon Added-Sugar Warning Labels for Restaurant Menus - American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#)