

# **SB866 - Written.pdf**

Uploaded by: Abby Snyder

Position: FAV

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.

Abby Snyder, District 41 Resident  
[Abigailfaye14@gmail.com](mailto:Abigailfaye14@gmail.com)

**SB866 Free State PTA - favorable.pdf**

Uploaded by: Beth Jarrett

Position: FAV

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

*Finance Committee*

February 25, 2026

**FAVORABLE**

Free State PTA (FSPTA) represents over 70,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. ***We are offering a favorable testimony in support of Senate Bill 866.***

This bill is a commonsense public health measure that gives Marylanders clear, easy-to-understand information at the point of purchase when menu items contain extremely high levels of added sugars or sodium. Excess sodium and added sugars are major contributors to preventable conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and obesity. Consumers deserve transparent information to make informed decisions for themselves and their families, especially when a single menu item can exceed half the recommended daily limit. SB 866 does not ban any foods or restrict consumer choice. It simply requires large chain restaurants to provide a clear warning icon and explanation, **ensuring that customers can quickly recognize high-risk items**. The bill also provides guidance from the Department of Health, and an education campaign to support compliance. By promoting transparency and informed choice, this legislation empowers Maryland residents, encourages healthier reformulation of menu items, and advances the goal of preventing chronic disease.

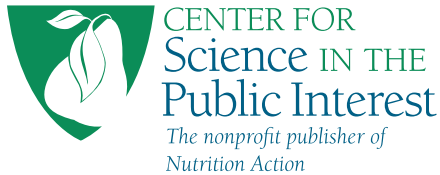
Free State PTA urges the committee to issue a favorable report on SB 866.

Thank you,  
Free State PTA, Advocacy Committee

**Informed Dining Testimony\_SB0866\_CSPI\_FINAL\_PDF.pdf**

Uploaded by: DeAnna Nara

Position: FAV



The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Senate Finance Chair and Members  
Senate Health Committee  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 0866  
*THE INFORMED DINING ACT*  
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026**

**The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) wishes to be recorded in strong support of SB 0866, *The Informed Dining Act*.**

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a nonprofit consumer education and advocacy organization that has worked since 1971 to improve public health through better nutrition and safer food, writes in strong support of SB 0866, *The Informed Dining Act*. This legislation improves the restaurant food environment in Maryland by requiring clear icons on chain restaurant menu items that contain half a day's recommended sodium or added sugars. By strengthening transparency at the point of purchase, the bill supports informed decision-making and can help reduce the risk of diet-related chronic disease.

Excess sodium and added sugars consumption remain significant public health concerns. The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend limiting sodium to less than 2,300 milligrams per day and limiting added sugars to less than 10 percent of total daily calories.<sup>1</sup> Excess sodium intake increases blood pressure,<sup>2,3</sup> and elevated blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.<sup>4</sup> Higher intake of added sugars is associated with increased risk of type 2 diabetes,<sup>5</sup> cardiovascular disease mortality,<sup>6</sup> and dental caries.<sup>7</sup>

These risks are reflected in Maryland's health profile. According to the Maryland Department of Health's Chronic Disease Burden Tables, 35.8 percent of adults in the state have hypertension and 12.3 percent have diabetes.<sup>8</sup>

Much of the sodium and added sugars in the American diet comes from restaurant and packaged foods. More than 70 percent of sodium consumed in the United States comes from packaged and restaurant foods, rather than from salt added at the table.<sup>9</sup> Sugar-sweetened beverages remain the largest source of added sugars in the U.S. diet.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, consumers significantly underestimate sodium levels in restaurant meals,<sup>11</sup> and survey research shows that consumers correctly identify menu items containing more than a day's worth of added sugars only about half (49%) of the time.<sup>12</sup>

Chain restaurant meals frequently approach or exceed recommended daily limits. A nationally representative analysis of default combination meals at U.S. fast food and fast casual restaurants

found that the average combination meal contained 2,110 milligrams of sodium and 68 grams of sugar—values that approach the daily limit for sodium and exceed the recommended daily limit for added sugars.<sup>13</sup> These levels make it difficult to regularly consume restaurant meals while maintaining a diet consistent with national dietary guidance. For example:

- The Subway Footlong Big Hot Pastrami contains **3,050 milligrams of sodium**.<sup>14</sup>
- The Chick-fil-A Cobb Salad contains **2,220 milligrams of sodium**.<sup>15</sup>
- The Smoothie King Coco Pitaya-Yah™ Smoothie Bowl contains **71 grams of added sugars**.<sup>16</sup>
- A 20-ounce Taco Bell Pepsi contains **69 grams of added sugars**.<sup>17</sup>
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To put that into perspective, 69 grams of sugar equals approximately 17 teaspoons,<sup>18</sup> illustrating how nutrient levels that appear modest on a menu can represent substantial quantities when translated into familiar measures.

CSPI’s national soda analysis found that most “small” regular sodas sold at the top 20 fast-food chains contain more than a full day’s worth of added sugars, most “large” sizes contain roughly double the recommended daily amount, and even some “kids” sizes exceed daily recommendations.<sup>19</sup>

Although federal law requires calorie labeling on chain restaurant menus,<sup>20</sup> calorie information alone does not address this problem. Two menu items with similar calorie counts can differ dramatically in sodium or added sugar content, making nutrient-specific disclosure necessary.

Large chain restaurants already calculate sodium and added sugars as part of their standardized recipes and nutrition analysis. Many major national chains including McDonald’s,<sup>21</sup> Taco Bell,<sup>22</sup> KFC,<sup>23</sup> and Dunkin’<sup>24</sup>—publish added sugars information online, and all chains subject to federal menu labeling provide sodium information in written nutrition materials.<sup>25</sup> However, this information is not presented consistently at the point of purchase and often requires additional steps for consumers to access. As a result, individuals face an uneven and fragmented information landscape when trying to make informed decisions. SB 0866 addresses this gap by ensuring that items containing extraordinarily high levels of sodium or added sugars are clearly identified at point of purchase.

Marketing practices further influence purchasing patterns. In 2019 alone, fast food chains such as McDonald’s, Domino’s, and Taco Bell spent nearly \$418 million on television advertising targeted to Black and Hispanic children and teens, and the vast majority of those ads promoted full-calorie, adult-sized menu items rather than kids’ meals..<sup>26</sup> These patterns increase exposure to products high in sodium and added sugars among youth.

SB 0866 addresses this information gap through a proportionate and balanced standard. The bill requires an icon next to menu items containing half a day’s recommended sodium or added sugars. A MenuStat-based analysis of 19,038 menu items across 91 top-grossing chain restaurants in the U.S. and found that a full-day sodium threshold would label only 5 percent of items, whereas a 50 percent Daily Value threshold would label 20 percent.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the majority of menu items would not carry an icon under this standard.

Evidence supports this approach. In a randomized controlled trial involving more than 15,000

U.S. adults, icon-only added sugar warnings improved identification of high-added-sugar items and supported more informed selections.<sup>28</sup> A meta-analysis of sugary drink warning studies found that warning labels improve consumer understanding and support more informed beverage choices.<sup>29</sup> Additional experimental research demonstrates that graphic and icon-based warnings are more effective than text-only warnings, and that icon warnings have a stronger impact among Latino parents and parents with low English literacy, highlighting the importance of visual design for equitable communication.<sup>30,31</sup>

Experience in U.S. cities demonstrates both feasibility and durability. New York City adopted a sodium warning icon rule in 2015,<sup>32</sup> with enforcement beginning later that year, and Philadelphia adopted and implemented a similar sodium warning policy beginning in 2021.<sup>33</sup> Following implementation in Philadelphia, the share of menu items requiring a sodium warning declined from 31 percent to 21 percent over time, suggesting recipe reformulation or menu adjustments in response to the policy.<sup>34</sup> More recently, New York City finalized and began implementing *The Sweet Truth Act*, requiring added sugars warnings on chain restaurant menus.<sup>35</sup> Together, these experiences show that nutrient disclosure policies can be implemented at scale in large jurisdictions and sustained over time.

In addition to improving consumer transparency, SB 0866 establishes a uniform statewide standard, ensuring consistent information across Maryland and preventing a patchwork of local requirements. The bill pairs icons with clear explanatory language so that consumers understand what the symbol represents, rather than relying on a visual marker alone. It directs the Maryland Department of Health to provide implementation guidance and education to support consistent compliance. Importantly, the legislation includes a report-back requirement to the General Assembly, allowing lawmakers to evaluate evidence of product reformulation and consumer behavior changes over time. These provisions reflect a balanced, practical approach that strengthens accountability while supporting smooth implementation.

SB 0866 does not restrict consumer choice. It does not prohibit any products. It simply ensures that Marylanders receive clear, consistent information when ordering food in chain restaurants.

For these reasons, CSPI respectfully urges a favorable report on SB 0866.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DeAnna M. Nara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

DeAnna Nara PhD, MSc, CNS, LDN, NU, CAPM  
Campaign Manager  
Center for Science in the Public Interest

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- <sup>5</sup> Malik, V. S., et al. (2019). Sugar-Sweetened Beverages and Cardiometabolic Health: An Update of the Evidence. *Nutrients*, 11(8), 1840. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11081840>
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- <sup>26</sup> UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity. Fast Food Facts 2021. Available at <https://media.ruddcenter.uconn.edu/PDFs/FACTS2021.pdf>

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**SB 866\_Horizon Foundation\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Glenn Schneider

Position: FAV



## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

February 25, 2026

**COMMITTEE:** Senate Finance Committee

**BILL:** SB 866 – Public Health – Chain Restaurants – Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons

**POSITION:** Support

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The Horizon Foundation is the largest independent health philanthropy in Maryland. We are committed to a Howard County free from systemic inequities, where all people can live abundant and healthy lives. The Foundation is pleased to **support SB 866 – Public Health – Chain Restaurants – Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons**. This bill requires large chain restaurants in the state to display warning icons next to menu items that contain high sodium and/or high added sugar content.

High sodium and high added sugar content are defined as containing 1150 milligrams or more per serving and 25 milligrams or more per serving, respectively. These levels are more than half of the total daily recommended limit and diets high in sodium and added sugar are closely linked to several leading chronic diseases.

The Horizon Foundation has worked for over a decade to reduce sugary drink consumption in Howard County. The beverage industry's predatory marketing has ensured that soda has become a staple in the American diet — and it is harming marginalized communities the most. This industry actively targets low-income people and communities of color — the very same groups that suffer disproportionately from type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease, dental cavities and other health problems associated with sugary drinks. And this marketing works — consumption is higher in low-income communities and among people of color.

Warning labels for added sugar and sodium are a proven tool and a commonsense indicator to consumers about the prevalence of these ingredients that may harm their health. Researchers from UC Davis found in an online experiment that added-sugar warning labels reduced the likelihood that consumers would order items containing high amounts of added sugar and can help inform consumers about the surprisingly high amount of added sugar in even the smallest sizes of soda or in items like salad dressings and sauces.<sup>i</sup>

Through the Foundation's policy and media work, we helped drive down soda sales in Howard County by 30% compared to a control community.<sup>ii</sup> However, much more work is needed to ensure that all Marylanders can live a healthy and abundant life. With chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and hypertension on the rise, we must do more to protect the health of our

communities. For this reason, the Foundation **SUPPORTS SB 866** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ucdavis.edu/blog/warning-labels-restaurant-menus-reduced-likelihood-consumers-would-order-high-sugar-foods>

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.ajpmfocus.org/article/S2773-0654\(22\)00007-4/pdf](https://www.ajpmfocus.org/article/S2773-0654(22)00007-4/pdf)

# **AHA Supports SB 866 Sodium and Added Sugars Label.**

Uploaded by: Laura Hale

Position: FAV



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 Maryland<sup>1</sup>. One in three adult Marylanders already has hypertension, also known as high blood pressure.<sup>2</sup> Excess added sugars contributes to heart disease, obesity, and Type 2 diabetes<sup>3</sup>.

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.<sup>4</sup> 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<sup>5,6</sup>.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> [Microsoft Word - BRFSB BRIEF 2017-04 Hypertension](#)

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

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

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

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

**2026 SB0866 FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Mathew Goldstein

Position: FAV



<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfU0l1WSdNHoXUz2uYdt4zf-ztmwuTz-rdKJ59WbJstj1Ylw/viewform>

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February 25 2026

**SB 0866 - FAV**

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

Dear Chair [Senator Pamela Beidle](#), Vice Chair [Antonio Hayes](#), and Members of the Finance Committee,

The recommended daily sodium limit is 2,300 mg. The average American adult consumes almost 50% more sodium than the recommended limit per day. Restaurant food tends to have more sodium than food prepared at home. Consuming too much sodium is linked to increased blood pressure and elevated risks of heart disease and of stroke. Together, heart disease and stroke kill more Americans each year than any other cause. High sugar consumption is positively correlated with obesity. Too much body fat can cause inflammation and other long-lasting changes in the body. Obesity can increase the risk of many serious health problems for adults and children. Obesity impacts health care costs for patients and the health care system.

New York City and Philadelphia enforce laws requiring chain restaurants to include high salt warnings, New York City also requires high sugar warnings, on menu items. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CPSI) looked at the sodium content of menu items from the top 91 highest-grossing US restaurant chains, and found that many menu items at these large chains exceeded the daily recommended sodium value for US adults. A recent study [[Strengthening salt reduction strategies in the out-of-home food sector: warning labels and beyond](#) Elisa Pineda *The Lancet Public Health* August, 2025] concluded that salt warning labels on restaurant menus in particular are a promising policy option to address excessive salt intake within the UK out-of-home food sector. Across two trials the labels were found to be equally effective regardless of age, sex, or education level. Secular Maryland shares with CPSI the perspective that public policy should be centered on promoting the public interest, including public health, in accord with results of the

relevant scientific research.

Respectfully,  
Mathew Goldstein  
3838 Early Glow Ln  
Bowie, MD

# **HB 1048\_SB 866\_ Public Health - Chain Restaurants**

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: FAV

**HB 1048/SB 866:** Public Health - **Chain Restaurants - Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons:** Please vote to **SUPPORT** this bill.

Dear Health Committee and Finance Committee:

I am writing to respectfully **support HB 1048/SB 866**, concerning *Public Health – Chain Restaurants – Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons*.

Maryland residents have become increasingly aware of the connection between diet and long-term health outcomes. Providing clear, visible warning icons for menu items that exceed recommended levels of sodium or added sugars is a commonsense step toward empowering consumers to make informed nutritional choices.

**HB 1048/SB 866 promotes transparency at the point of purchase**, allowing individuals and families to better understand the nutritional content of the food they are ordering in chain restaurants. Many consumers may not realize that certain menu items contain excessive levels of sodium or added sugars that can contribute to chronic health conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes, obesity and metabolic syndrome, dental issues and poorer overall health.

Importantly, this legislation does not restrict consumer choice or limit what restaurants may offer. Chain restaurants would be required to label foods honestly, which may push them to reformulate recipes to reduce sodium or added sugars or offer healthier menu options. Also, it ensures that customers have access to clear and easily understandable information before making a decision. When people are equipped with accurate information, they are better positioned to manage their personal health and dietary needs.

Providing nutritional warning icons is a reasonable, low-burden approach that supports public health awareness while maintaining freedom of choice. **Helping Marylanders make informed decisions today may reduce preventable health complications and associated healthcare costs in the future.**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support HB 1048/SB 866**.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Trudy Tibbals

**SB866 testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Kirk McCauley

Position: UNF



WMDA/CAR Service Station  
and Automotive Repair Association

Chair: Pamela Beidle and members of Senate Finance

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

Position: Oppose

My name is Kirk McCauley, my employer is WMDA/CAR, we represent service stations, convenience stores, and repair facilities across the state as a non-profit trade group established in 1937.

A lot of our convenience store members have a branded location within their building but these locations, while part of a brand, are franchised, operated by individual retailers. Cost to these retailers in space and signage would be expensive, depending on type of menu boards, number of menu boards. Small retailers have seen higher wages, Family and Sick leave will be online soon, Electric bills have doubled and in general costs have outpaced price increases. SB866 leaves too many items open for MDH to decide with no input from retailers.

While there being an added cost to small retail, results are questionable, along **First Offence, 90 days in jail** and \$1,000 fine! These retailers employ thousands of residents that might not have the skills to work in other industries and you want to lock them up for not having an Icon warning on one of their signs. While I know intentions are good, it has far too many unintentional consequences.

WMDA/CAR asks for an unfavorable vote on SB866.

Any questions, contact to Kirk McCauley, 301-775-0221 or  
kmccauley@wmdacar.com

# **SB866\_RestaurantAssoc\_Thompson\_UNF**

Uploaded by: Melvin Thompson

Position: UNF



## Senate Bill 866

*Public Health - Chain Restaurants - Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons*

March 5, 2026

Position: **OPPOSE**

Madame Chair and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The Restaurant Association of Maryland opposes Senate Bill 866. This bill requires chain restaurants to display warning icons and accompanying text on menus and menu boards next to each standard menu item that has high sodium content or high added sugars content. An additional disclosure explaining the warning icons must be prominently, clearly, and conspicuously displayed at the point of selection.

No other state has enacted such requirements. Only New York City (NYC) and Philadelphia require similar high sodium warning icons and statements for chain restaurant menus. And NYC also requires high added sugar warning icons and statements for chain restaurant prepackaged food items and equivalent non-packaged items.

Since 2018, federal menu labeling regulations require chain restaurants with 20 or more locations doing business under the same name (and offering substantially the same menu items) to disclose calories on the menu and provide additional nutrition information to customers upon request (total calories, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, **sodium**, total carbohydrate, dietary fiber, **sugars** [total], and protein).

Chain restaurants already provide comprehensive nutritional information to customers in compliance with the federal requirements, which includes information about sodium and sugar content. This information is widely available to customers on websites, via QR codes, and also in printed format at some chain restaurants. State-specific high sodium and high added sugar warning icons would undermine national uniformity, create a patchwork of inconsistent thresholds (the arbitrary thresholds in SB 866 do not align with FDA's dietary guidelines), and potentially confuse customers when nutrition messages differ by state/jurisdiction. Part of the intent of the federal menu labeling rules for chain restaurants was to establish nationwide uniformity for brands that operate in multiple states. Likewise, any additional requirements for menu disclosures or notices related to nutritional information at chain restaurants should also be uniform, federal rules.

With regard to added sugar specifically, unlike packaged foods, federal menu labeling rules do not require chain restaurants to disclose added sugars. The federal rules require disclosure of total sugars. Added sugar is far more difficult to calculate and maintain accurately in restaurant foods than in packaged foods. For these reasons, NYC's high added sugars warning icon requirement for chain restaurants applies only to prepackaged food items and equivalent non-packaged items (meaning non-packaged items presented as the same products as a packaged item, such as fountain soda or coffee beverages). NYC's added sugars warning does not apply to restaurant menu items prepared onsite to fulfill customer orders because FDA's current rules for disclosing added sugars apply only to prepackaged foods. Maryland Senate Bill 866 would be a significant departure from federal and NYC rules regarding sugars.

-more-

Although Senate Bill 866 is well intended, the reality is that data from NYC show no significant changes in customer ordering habits since 2015 when the high sodium warning icons requirement for chain restaurants became effective. According to our registered dietitian consultant, there are two PLOS One studies ([Prasad et al., 2023](#); and [Sisti et al., 2023](#)) that confirm this, and are generally the best peer-reviewed evaluations of purchasing behavior during early implementation of the NYC sodium warning regulation. Interestingly, these are the same studies cited by the Maryland Department of Health in their *Letter of Information* submitted to the Senate Finance Committee regarding Senate Bill 866.

Without data showing a quantifiable public health benefit or change in customer ordering habits as a direct result of such warning icons, it would be imprudent for Maryland to be the first state to enact such a mandate.

Implementing such a requirement also imposes significant costs on chain restaurants to redesign/update menus and menu boards for compliance, which also includes drive-thru signage, kiosks, mobile apps, websites, and third-party delivery platforms. This can be a challenge because menu space is limited. And for franchise locations, these costs would be borne by small business owners.

And lastly, given that a substantial number of customers modify their orders, substitute ingredients, add or remove toppings/condiments/sauces to suit their taste, and often share appetizers, sides, and desserts, warning icons can be misleading because they do not account for these frequent variations and changes in serving sizes.

For these reasons, we oppose this legislation and request an unfavorable report.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melvin R. Thompson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Melvin R. Thompson  
Senior Vice President  
Government Affairs and Public Policy

**SB866\_MRA\_UNF.pdf**

Uploaded by: Sarah Price

Position: UNF

# MARYLAND RETAILERS ALLIANCE

*The Voice of Retailing in Maryland*



**SB866 Public Health - Chain Restaurants - Sodium and Added Sugars Warning  
Icons  
Finance Committee  
February 25, 2026**

**Position:** Unfavorable

**Background:** SB866 would require restaurants with at least 20 locations to add specific icons to menu items to indicate sodium and sugar content.

**Comments:** The Maryland Retailers Alliance (MRA) is opposed to the passage of SB866 Public Health - Chain Restaurants - Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons, which would require restaurants with at least 20 locations to add additional icons to menu items to indicate added sugars and sodium content. Federal law already requires restaurants with at least 20 locations to provide nutritional information, including but not limited to sodium and total sugar content, for all menu items to patrons upon request. Restaurants often post their menu and nutritional information online, meaning customers are able to review the nutritional information of all food items before choosing to patronize specific restaurants or can independently access this information while reviewing the menu in a restaurant. Restaurant employees can provide the information or assist with access at any time should a patron require it. With this access already in place, the requirements proposed by SB866 are duplicative and unnecessary.

For these reasons, MRA would respectfully urge an unfavorable report on SB866. Thank you for your consideration.

**SB 866 - FIN- MDH- LOI.docx (1).pdf**

Uploaded by: Meghan Lynch

Position: INFO



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Meena Seshamani, M.D., Ph.D., Secretary

February 25, 2026

The Honorable Pamela Beidle  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
2 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

**RE: Senate Bill 866 – Public Health – Chain Restaurants – Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons – Letter of Information**

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of information for Senate Bill (SB) 866 – Public Health – Chain Restaurants – Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons. SB 866 requires the Department to adopt regulations requiring certain chain restaurants to display standardized warning icons and accompanying text on menus for items high in sodium or added sugars beginning in 2028. The bill directs the Department to conduct an education campaign in 2027 to explain the purpose and how chain restaurants may comply, and submit a report to the General Assembly on the policy’s impact by 2032.

SB 866 aims to improve consumer awareness at the point of purchase at chain restaurants through clear visual cues that help individuals make informed food choices. By enabling patrons to quickly and easily identify foods that are high in sugar and sodium, the bill supports healthier decision-making, particularly for individuals living with chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension who must carefully monitor their dietary intake.

The Department notes that data from the New York City sodium warning icon rule suggests that while point-of-purchase labeling can increase consumer awareness and may modestly influence purchasing patterns, the overall impact on consistent behavior change and product reformulation has been limited and mixed. Evaluations found small reductions in average sodium purchased, but no significant decline in the proportion of consumers selecting high-sodium items, and little evidence of widespread industry reformulation<sup>1,2</sup>, suggesting that awareness-based strategies

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<sup>1</sup> Sisti, J. S., Prasad, D., Niederman, S., Mezzacca, T. A., Anekwe, A. V., Clapp, J., & Farley, S. M. (2023). Sodium content of menu items in New York City chain restaurants following enforcement of the sodium warning icon rule, 2015–2017. *PLoS ONE*, 18(5), Article e0274648. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0274648>

<sup>2</sup> Prasad, D., Jasek, J. P., Anekwe, A. V., Dominianni, C., Mezzacca, T. A., Sisti, J. S., Farley, S. M., & Kessler, K. (2023). Changes in consumer purchasing patterns at New York City chain restaurants following adoption of the sodium warning icon rule, 2015–2017. *PLoS ONE*, 18(4), Article e0274044. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0274044>

alone may not reliably produce sustained behavioral or structural change, particularly without complementary policy mechanisms or broader public health interventions.

The Department notes that the report required by SB 866, due by July 1, 2032, may be of limited utility in assessing the law's impact, because the absence of baseline data will make it difficult to measure any change over time. Furthermore, the Department would not be notified if or when restaurants reformulate menu items, nor would the Department have information about the reasons for any changes. As a result, the Department would be unable to accurately determine the extent or cause of any observed changes in consumer behavior under the requirements outlined in the bill.

If SB 866 is adopted, the Department's Office of Food Protection (OFP) would review menus for newly constructed and proposed prototypical food service facilities that meet the bill's criteria. Retail food service facilities (FSF) are licensed by the local health departments, therefore, currently licensed retail food service facilities that are already constructed and operating would need to comply by submitting menus to local health departments for review. This would require training of local health department food protection staff, as well as outreach to the FSFs that are affected by the new law. Conducting the required educational campaign in 2027 to explain the purpose of and how chain restaurants may comply with the new law would require development of new outreach materials.

SB 866 will impose both an operational and fiscal impact on the Department, requiring the development of regulations, published website guidance, execution of an educational campaign to restaurants, and submit a one-time formal impact report to the General Assembly.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Meghan Lynch, Director of Governmental Affairs at [meghan.lynch@maryland.gov](mailto:meghan.lynch@maryland.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Meena Seshamani', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Meena Seshamani, M.D., Ph.D.  
Secretary of Health