



The Honorable Heather Bagnall, House Chair and Members
House Health Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS OF SB 866
THE INFORMED DINING ACT
HOUSE HEALTH COMMITTEE
March 31st, 2026**

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) wishes to be recorded in support with amendments of SB 866, *The Informed Dining Act*, to align the bill with the stronger House-passed approach in HB 1048.

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, supports the goal of SB 0866 to improve the restaurant food environment in Maryland. However, we respectfully urge the Committee to amend the bill to restore clear, on-menu icon disclosure, consistent with HB 1048, rather than relying solely on electronic disclosure such as QR codes.

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.¹ Excess sodium intake increases blood pressure,^{2,3} and elevated blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.⁴ Higher intake of added sugars is associated with increased risk of type 2 diabetes,⁵ cardiovascular disease mortality,⁶ and dental caries.⁷

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.⁸

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.⁹ Sugar-sweetened beverages remain the largest source of added sugars in the U.S. diet.¹⁰ At the same time, consumers significantly underestimate sodium levels in restaurant meals,¹¹ 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.¹²

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.¹³ 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**.¹⁴
- The Chick-fil-A Cobb Salad contains **2,220 milligrams of sodium**.¹⁵
- The Smoothie King Coco Pitaya-Yah™ Smoothie Bowl contains **71 grams of added sugars**.¹⁶
- A 20-ounce Taco Bell Pepsi contains **69 grams of added sugars**.¹⁷
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To put that into perspective, 69 grams of sugar equals approximately 17 teaspoons,¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

This context underscores the importance of clear, accessible information at the point of purchase.

While SB 866 aims to improve transparency, replacing on-menu disclosure with QR codes would undermine that goal.

Electronic disclosure creates barriers between consumers and critical health information. Accessing information through a QR code requires a smartphone, a data plan, reliable connectivity, and time; conditions that are not consistently met across Maryland.²⁰ Even when available, QR codes require multiple steps, making it less likely that information will be accessed or used in real-time decision-making.

These barriers disproportionately affect older adults, lower-income individuals, and communities with limited digital access.²¹ In practice, QR code–only disclosure risks creating an uneven system where some Marylanders can access information and others cannot.

By contrast, on-menu icons provide immediate, equitable, and usable information at the moment decisions are made.

HB 1048 reflects a balanced and practical approach by requiring clear icons directly on menus while still allowing supplemental digital access. This ensures transparency without creating barriers.

Evidence supports this approach. Studies show that icon-based warnings improve consumers’ ability to identify high-sodium and high–added sugar items and support more informed choices. 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.²² A meta-analysis of sugary drink warning studies found that warning labels improve consumer understanding and support more informed beverage choices.²³ 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.^{24,25}

Experience in other jurisdictions demonstrates feasibility. New York City and Philadelphia have successfully implemented sodium warning icons,^{26,27} and New York City has expanded this approach to added sugars.²⁸ These policies have been sustained over time and have encouraged industry reformulation.²⁹

Importantly, icon-based disclosure does not restrict consumer choice. It simply ensures that consumers have clear, consistent information when ordering food.

For these reasons, CSPI respectfully urges the Committee to adopt amendments to SB 0866 to align with the House-passed version of HB 1048 by:

- Restoring on-menu icon disclosure for items exceeding threshold levels of sodium or added sugars
- Retaining QR codes only as a supplemental tool, not a replacement
- Preserving the bill's clear, standardized, and enforceable framework

With these amendments, SB 0866 can achieve its intended goal of improving transparency and supporting informed decision-making for all Marylanders.

CSPI respectfully urges a favorable report with amendments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. DeAnna M. Nara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

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