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March 31, 2026

COMMITTEE: House Health Committee

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

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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.ⁱ

Through the Foundation's policy and media work, we helped drive down soda sales in Howard County by 30% compared to a control community.ⁱⁱ 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.

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

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