



March 27, 2026

Testimony of Laura Hale
American Heart Association

Fav W/ Amend of SB 866 Public Health - Chain Restaurants - Sodium and Added Sugars Warning Icons

Dear Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and Honorable Members of the Health 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 support with the House's Amendments of SB 866.

Please restore the sodium and added sugar icons onto this legislation and keep firm on the House's position. With the icons, consumers can see at-a-glance what food are high in added sugars and sodium. Hiding nutrition information behind a QR Code creates barriers in accessing this information. Families at the check out lane do not currently and will not with a QR Code added dig into the lengthy online pdfs of nutrition information. To make a real change for public health, easy-to-read icons on the menu are key.

Additionally, I have included at the end some visual examples from menus in NYC/Philadelphia of the icons already on the menu. This is something chain restaurants are already doing and can do in Maryland.

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

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

² [Microsoft Word - BRFSB 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](#)

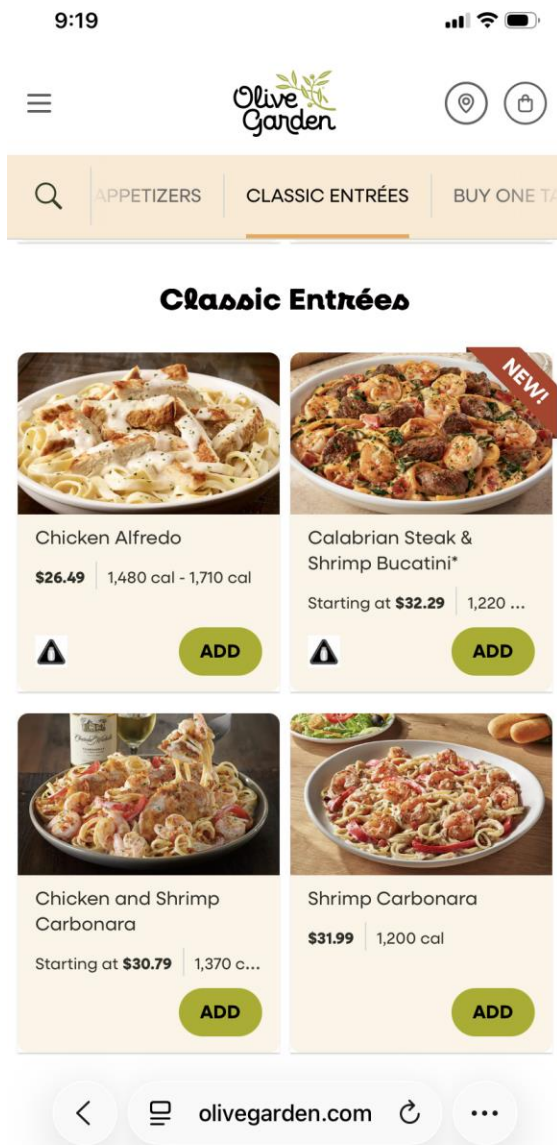
trials showed that people who are provided with information labels regarding sodium and added sugars choose to avoid those items compared with people who are not provided with labels⁵⁶.

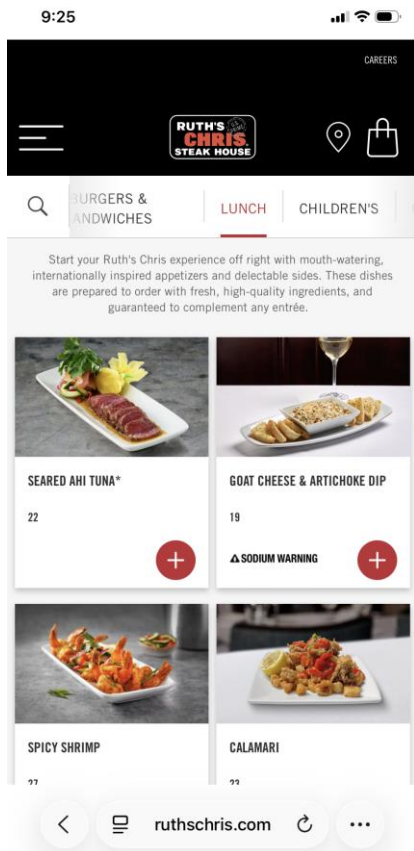
The American Heart Association urges a swift and favorable report with the [House's amendments](#) on SB 866.

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](#)

Examples from Chain Restaurants that are Currently Using the Icons:





Amended Version we Support: [2026 Regular Session - House Bill 1048 Third Reader](#)