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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
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**HB 1048**

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

Chair Bagnall, Vice Chair Cullison, and esteemed members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 1048, which would require the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to support informed dining by educating consumers and working with chain restaurants to establish a clear symbol next to food items with high added sugar or high sodium content on their menus.

In Maryland, heart disease has been the leading cause of death, with diabetes following in sixth place, according to the CDC.<sup>1</sup> This is a nationwide issue; most American children and adults consume added sugar beyond the Dietary Guidelines recommended limit, which exposes the population to a range of severe health issues. Excessive consumption of sugar contributes to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and dental cavities<sup>2</sup>. In addition, high sodium consumption is a leading contributor to heart disease, hypertension, and stroke<sup>3</sup>.

Americans are recommended to limit their sodium intake to 2,300 mg/day (equal to about 1 teaspoon) to reduce the risk of chronic disease. However, about 90% of Americans consume excessive sodium with an average daily intake of 3,393 mg of sodium a day (1 ½ teaspoons), which is nearly 150 percent above the recommended limit. To make matters worse, the average sodium content of a chain restaurant meal in the US is 2,110 milligrams, which is 92% of the recommended daily amount for sodium.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Food and Drug Administration, the daily value for added sugars is 50

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<sup>1</sup> CDC. "Maryland." Stats of the States, 20 Aug. 2025, [www.cdc.gov/nchs/state-stats/states/md.html](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/state-stats/states/md.html).

<sup>2</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest. The Sweet Truth about Added Sugars: Why New York Needs Menu Warnings S427 (Rivera)/A5305 (Reyes).

<sup>3</sup>Center for Science in the Public Interest. The Salty Truth about Sodium: Why New York Needs Menu Warnings S428 (Rivera)/A6529 (Reyes). Jan. 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest. The Salty Truth about Sodium: Why New York Needs Menu Warnings S428 (Rivera)/A6529 (Reyes). Jan. 2025.

grams per day based on a 2,000-calorie daily diet. Most Americans consume added sugars through sugary drinks, which when served by restaurant chains, contain more than a day's worth of added sugars. One "small" sugary drink can reach well over 65 grams of added sugar.<sup>5</sup> HB 1048 identifies "high-added sugars content" as 25 milligrams or more of added sugars per serving. Since little over 21% of calories consumed in the U.S. comes from restaurants, reducing high added sugar and sodium content must become both a statewide and nationwide public health priority<sup>6</sup>. Restaurants are an important partner in the work to improve public health.

An individual's ability to make informed dining decisions to reduce added sugar and sodium intake is heavily dependent on the environment in which they make food decisions<sup>7</sup>. Many consumers make food choices in drive-thrus and through physical menus. However, chain restaurants are not required to disclose added sugar or sodium items at the point of sale, which contributes to the drought of nutritional information needed to make health conscious choices. It is important to note that chain restaurants already have this information available for consumers online, and providing the information in a clear, consumer-focused manner should not be a significant burden.

Studies show that warning labels are an excellent way to increase consumer knowledge about high sodium and sugar content in restaurant meals and that labels also motivate consumers to make healthier food choices. Studies found that warning labels, like a traffic or a red stop sign, significantly reduced sodium consumption for study participants.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in an American Journal of Preventative Medicine study, added sugar warning labels reduced the probability of ordering a high-added sugar menu item.<sup>9</sup>

To aid in healthy choices for Marylanders at chain restaurants, HB 1048 will require MDH to establish and implement high sodium and added sugar content warning icons with accompanying text, and establish a minimum size for each warning icon so that it is as visible as the food item descriptions on the menu. The Department must also publish guidelines on its website that show the purpose of this public health campaign and how chain restaurants may conform to the requirements. Beginning January 2028, each chain restaurant in Maryland would be required to display these icons on their physical menus. These changes would help increase a consumer's understanding of their food choices.

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<sup>5</sup>Center for Science in the Public Interest. The Salty Truth about Sodium: Why New York Needs Menu Warnings S428 (Rivera)/A6529 (Reyes). Jan. 2025.

<sup>6</sup>Center for Science in the Public Interest. Sweet Excess Largest Restaurant Chains Consistently Serve up Drinks with More than a Day's Worth of Added Sugars. July 2021.

<sup>7</sup>Center for Science in the Public Interest. Sweet Excess Largest Restaurant Chains Consistently Serve up Drinks with More than a Day's Worth of Added Sugars. July 2021.

<sup>8</sup>Musicus, Aviva A, et al. "Online Randomized Controlled Trials of Restaurant Sodium Warning Labels." American Journal of Preventive Medicine, vol. 57, no. 6, Dec. 2019, pp. e181–e193, [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31753271/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31753271/), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2019.06.024>.

<sup>9</sup>Falbe, Jennifer, et al. "Online RCT of Icon Added-Sugar Warning Labels for Restaurant Menus." American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Apr. 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2023.02.007>. May 2023.

HB 1048 is a step into Maryland's healthy future, where informed dining decisions are at the forefront of lifestyle choices.

**Thank you for the committee's consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 1048.**