

## Floor Debate

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#### Full Formal Session

01/28/2010 11:00 AM House Chamber

- **Jeffery Sanchez, (Democrat) 15th Suffolk :** ([Hide Debate](#))

This is a topic that affects all of us directly, especially our children, our most valuable asset. 73% of our middle and high school students are allowed to buy sugar and fat-filled food, poor, calorie-dense foods. This bill is to replace those foods with better nutrition promoting a healthy environment that will shrink the high levels of childhood obesity. The statistics are not shocking when it's clear that obesity and all of its health problems and disparities come from bad food choices that leave out servings of fruit and vegetables. 2007 report shows that 25% of African American children are obese. This is taking up health costs that could easily be avoided. Obesity is a huge drain of our tax dollar. The medical costs for diabetes alone is 3 billion dollars a year.

This legislation is reaching support from doctors, teachers, parents, and house members. This bill will address how we will pay for this legislation. That is not an issue because it will have almost no start up costs. In addition, it will make the Department of Public Health eligible for federal funds. It will put us in a better position to win those grants to supplement our costs. A recent collection of research studies has shown that schools that switched to healthy foods and no---or only healthy--- vending machine foods haven't lost money. In fact, schools reported an 80% gain in income from selling healthier food.

- **Peter J. Koutoujian, (Democrat), 10th Middlesex:** ([Hide Debate](#))

We may be raising the first generation of children that has a shorter life expectancy than their parents. That has never happened, and it's happening from children living on bad, high calorie, low nutrition food. The 1st 2nd 3rd and 6th leading causes of death are all related to diseases that come from obesity and eating unhealthy food. This bill will require fruit, vegetables, and water. 98 % of our children spend at least 8 hours a day in access to these unhealthy foods.

The cost of obesity is incredible. Mass spent over 1 .8 billion dollars on the cost of obesity. This is preventable. There is a significant link to academic performance and bad nourishment, malnutrition. High calorie foods lead to malnutrition and obesity simultaneously. It has bad effects on cognitive function and development. One study showed overweight children had lower reading and math scores. Overall revenues will not be effected. It also finds there's increased participation in funded food programs which bring more federal dollars to our schools.

- **James M. Cantwell, (Democrat), 4th Plymouth:** ([Hide Debate](#))

One in 5 children has a dangerously high cholesterol level. An obese child forces huge expense. Clearly the time is now. This bill will transform our school environments by replacing junk food with

healthy choices. In my district this brings local jobs as well. Local farms employ of 13 thousand people in our state.

- **George N. Peterson, Jr., (Republican), 9th Worcester:** ([Hide Debate](#))

This amendment deals with the Farms and Schools Project, which has been beneficial to local farmers who sell goods to local schools. This would allow that to expand. Common sense shows that this helps both business and schools and kids. I have some concerns when the government starts to step-in to our daily lives. In this day and age, the problem of obesity is from a lack of parental guidance to push kids outside because no one is home when the kid gets home or leaves for school. Where's the parental responsibility. I know government has some responsibility, as does the individual. If this provision were adopted, I would support this bill.

- **Peter J. Koutoujian, (Democrat), 10th Middlesex:** ([Hide Debate](#))

Amendments 5, 6, 7, & 8, the farm-to-school piece is an economic development piece. There are 7,700 farms producing food in Massachusetts employing 20,000 people across the state. 63% of students attend schools that are receiving goods from farmers. Local farmers can lower prices, and increase profits for farms. It also includes universities and colleges and suggests they participate in such a project. In this bill we have less pollution, less use of fossil fuels, and far greater nutritional value.

- **Stephen Kulik, (Democrat), 1st Franklin:** ([Hide Debate](#))

I support this amendment. I'm privileged to represent the Connecticut River Valley with some of the greatest farmland in the world. We have engaged in this program to help the local economy and provide better food to school children. It's great that it opens the exemption to public institutions of higher education as well.

- **Jennifer M. Callahan, (Democrat), 18th Worcester:** ([Hide Debate](#))

I filed an amendment because the one thing I would ask us all to pay close attention to is that unfortunately when we release bills, we short change the public on their ability to weigh in. We could make a better bill if we had 24 hours to hear from people on school boards and in public health education on all of this. This bill is a step in the right direction, but the one thing to include is that because more than 53 million young people, that's 20 % of our national population, is within a school boundary for many hours of almost every day, when we talk about important things, school nutrition is an important part of that, but not all that there is. Far too often our attention to public health waxes and wanes based on resources , but the fundamental issue is: Are we actually helping the health of our kids? From here we'll go other places to address health and well-being. Places like physical activity, like health education, even like cyber bullying. So this bill looks at the creation of school health advisory councils. This way we can avoid a piecemeal approach. We have a moral responsibility to look at the totality of the issue, so we can all rest assured that the health and well-being of the total child will be taken care of.