

October 10th, 2015

Jim Nielson
State Capitol, Room 2068
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear honorable Senator Nielson:

I am writing to you today in regards to SB 203 that you voted against recently. It is to my dismay that the bill failed during passage in the committee and must be reconsidered and so it is my hope that through this letter, that I may convince you to reconsider your vote. As you are already aware, SB 203 proposes that the Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Safety Warning Act be established and administered by the Department of Public Health, which would require that all sealed beverages that have been sweetened by sugar, with the exception of beverages that are filled by the individual, have a warning label attached in a location that is clearly visible at the establishment in which it is sold.

The ever-growing problem of overweight and obese individuals in the United States is one that has many contributing factors. Among them is the lack of education on matters related to healthy eating and nutrition across all demographics. On the younger end of the demographic, topics pertaining to healthy nutrition are either not emphasized or too brief to be of any relevance in the education system. In the older age brackets, most of the time, it is not a lack of information that is the problem but rather, having too much to the point where it is difficult to determine what sources provide accurate and reliable information. It is common for an individual interested in learning how to live a healthier lifestyle to become overwhelmed by all of the information available thanks to modern technology. Varying sources can offer contradicting information which makes it almost impossible for the layman citizen who is not versed in scientific jargon or reason to distinguish between whose advice should be applied to their life. With this in mind, the addition of warning labels to all sales of sugar-sweetened beverages would be a step towards the promotion of living a healthier lifestyle by discouraging the consumption of food-products that have been found to be a major cause of obesity. Studies have shown that individuals who drink at least one sugar-sweetened drink per day to have a 26% higher risk for developing type 2 diabetes. As it stands, nearly 40 percent of Californian children are currently overweight or obese, with the number increasing every year. According to the research done by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 41 percent of children between the ages of 2-11 and 62 percent of those ages 12-17 in California consume at least one sugar-sweetened beverage, or SSB, everyday. In another study done by the New England Journal of Medicine, it concluded that the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages may be the single largest factor in the obesity epidemic worldwide.

In my opinion, based off of personal experiences and observations, have noticed that many people are of the assumption that only soda is considered to to be unhealthy when it comes to liquid drinks. As a result, many individuals purchase other drinks such as fruit juice, sports, coffee, and energy drinks, thinking that they are a healthier alternative to the traditional soda.

Imagine the scenario of an overweight or obese layman individual that regularly consumes SSBs on a daily basis that is interested in reading a secondary article online or a blog post by a friend that selectively cites an unknown study and makes the claim that drinking cranberry juice is a much healthier alternative than soda as it contains powerful antioxidants and a large array of vitamins and minerals. This individual, under the assumption that they do not have in-depth knowledge or received an education on making an informative decision for their eating habits, would then likely throw out all the soda in their house and replace it with cranberry juice. Since this individual was never educated on how to read a nutrition label, they fail to realize that many fruit juices can contain just as much sugar, and in some cases, more sugar than a soda. In the worst scenario, the individual, based off of misguided information, consumes more of the juice thinking that it is a healthier alternative than the soda, which would leave them worse off.

By requiring clearly visible warning labels to be placed on SSB's at the location of the establishment selling the drink, it promotes greater awareness of the true nature of the product that they are considering purchasing. The message of the label would be widely accepted by many as it has been placed there under the jurisdiction of a well-respected and credible source, the government. Although the label itself may not directly attack the root of the common problem of misinformation when it comes to healthy nutrition and public health, it would at the least raise awareness and promote deeper research into previously held beliefs that may result in making food decisions that negatively impact their health, such as the aforementioned example that fruit juices are healthier than sodas. Even raising the slightest doubt that their purchase of SSB's may not be the healthiest choice would be a step closer towards tackling the obesity epidemic.

With this information in mind, I ask you to reconsider your position on SB 203.

Sincerely,

Ryan Bui

Overview

Sources of information:

1. Official California Legislative Information:
https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160SB203
2. Official Page of Senator Jim Nielsen (California 4th District):
<http://nielsen.cssrc.us/content/my-offices>
3. Intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and weight gain: a systematic review:
<http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/84/2/274.full>

Number/Title of Bill:

SB 203: Sugar-sweetened beverages: safety warnings

State: Senate (California)

Status: Active Bill – In Committee Process, failed passage in committee, reconsideration granted

Why I chose to write to Senator Nielson: Senator Nielson is one of the senators that voted against the passing of SB203 and has the power to swing the vote the other way. I wrote with the purpose of trying to get him to reconsider his position.

Overview of SB 203:

The consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, or SSBs, has been shown to be a large contributing factor to the growing problem of individuals being obese or overweight in the United States. Although there are many factors that lead to the excess consumption of SSBs, a lack of awareness and information on what is classified as an SSB and the health implications of its consumption is among one of them. The lay consumer is not aware that beverages that are seen as healthier alternatives to the commonly known SSB, soda, such as coffee, fruit, and sports drinks are also usually laden with sugar and in some cases, may even contain more than soda.

SB 203 would establish the Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Safety Warning Act, which would require a safety warning label on all sugar-sweetened beverages, or SSBs, to be posted in a place that is clearly visible at the location of the establishment from which it is purchased, with the exception of locations where the beverage is self-filled by the consumer. This bill would be administered and monitored by the California Department of Public Health. The warning label would read, “STATE OF CALIFORNIA SAFETY WARNING: Drinking beverages with added sugar(s) contributes to obesity, diabetes, and tooth decay” on the front of container and separated from all other information, such as the nutrition label or brands, logos, slogans, etc.