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Testimony
House Education and Labor Committee
Hearing on “The Benefits of Physical and Health Education for Our Nation’s
Children,”
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Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon, and Members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify at this important hearing on improving physical education and the health of our nation’s children.

Nearly six years ago, I founded the Congressional Fitness Caucus, which is a bipartisan group of more than eighty Members of Congress dedicated to increasing awareness about the danger of obesity and promoting the benefits of physical activity to overall health and wellness. I am proud to be here with Congressman Ron Kind, co-chair of the Congressional Fitness Caucus, to advocate for these vital causes.

It was Thomas Jefferson that said, “A child who is not physically well cannot learn.” His words could not be more true today, as childhood obesity in the United States reaches epidemic proportions, jeopardizing not only the health of our kids, but also their academic development.

The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that by 2010, 20 percent of children in the United States will be obese. A decline in physical activity has been a significant factor in the unprecedented rise in childhood obesity. A troubling consequence of obesity is the growing number of children experiencing illnesses and other health problems, such as Type II diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, respiratory problems, and some cancers.

The rise in obesity-related health conditions also has high economic costs and has greatly increased health care spending. Our nation is already spending nearly \$100 billion a year on obesity related health care costs. If we don’t change our lifestyles, our Medicare and Medicaid systems will be overwhelmed. The most effective and practical way to combat rising healthcare costs is for people to get healthy by engaging in physical activity.

Despite these staggering social and economic costs, many schools are cutting back on physical education and health education programs because of budgetary concerns and the demand for stronger academic standards in math, reading, and science. In fact, between 1991 and 2003, enrollment of high school students in daily physical education classes decreased from 42 percent to 28 percent.

In addition to reducing childhood obesity, many studies have shown that regular physical activity strengthens academic performance and improves overall physical and emotional health of children and teens. The research is complete and, despite the fact that our society is overmedicating our children in many ways, the most effective anti-depressant in the history of the world is sweat! We must work to become a nation that exercises

more because the human body was made to move. The more children we can encourage to have a regime of physical activity in their lives and take better care of themselves, the better off we will be as a society.

By the fourth grade, every child should know there are adverse consequences to a sedentary lifestyle. In doing so, we will also see the benefits in their math and reading test scores, get to the cause of the obesity epidemic, and encourage children to lead a healthy life.

In order to strengthen physical education in our nation's schools and address the childhood obesity epidemic, I am an original cosponsor of the Fitness Integrated with Teaching (FIT) Kids Act, H.R. 3257. This bill would engage parents and the public by asking all schools, districts, and states to report on students' physical activity, and would help faculty and staff learn new ways to promote kids' healthy lifestyles and physical activity through professional development opportunities. The bill would also authorize a study and pilot program to support effective ways to combat childhood obesity and improve healthy living and physical activity for all children.

The FIT Kids Act is a bipartisan bill and has the support of more than forty combined health, education, and physical activity organizations. This legislation is critical to strengthen physical education, which will improve academic performance and provide students with the physical activity and education to lead healthy lifestyles. By taking action and important steps to increase physical activity and reduce obesity amongst our youth, we can improve academic performance, decrease medical costs, and save lives.

Thank you again for your dedication and support of the cause of improving the health of our children and I look forward to working with you as we move forward to improve physical education in our nation's schools.