

Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA)
Testimony
Subcommittee on Healthy Families and Communities
Hearing on “Improving Child Nutrition Programs to Reduce Childhood Obesity”
May 14, 2009

Chairwoman McCarthy, Congressman Platts, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing on childhood obesity. Our schools can have a very powerful impact on the way our children eat and the lessons they learn about healthy living. With WIC and child nutrition programs set to be reauthorized this year, we have an opportunity to take bold steps to reverse these dangerous trends. I commend the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing and its continued attention to the health and well-being of our nation’s children.

Children spend more than a third of their young lives at school – including before and after school and often times school holidays. So, it is important that schools provide healthy foods throughout the entire school day. Unfortunately, current nutrition standards for foods sold at school, but outside of the school meal programs, are inconsistent and often unhealthy. For example, doughnuts are allowed in, but lollipops are not. Cookies are fine, but breath mints are banned. These standards don’t make any sense. They haven’t been updated since my children were in school in the 70’s. Today, my grandchildren are in school, with the same junk foods available that should have replaced years ago.

No wonder the childhood obesity is becoming an epidemic. Today, 23 million children and adolescents are obese or overweight. Obesity rates for children between 6 and 11 years old have more than quadrupled over the last 40 years. Throughout their lives, these children are at greater risk for heart disease, Type 2 Diabetes, stroke, cancer, and social and psychological problems.

That’s why I’ve reintroduced H.R. 1324, the Child Nutrition Promotion and School Lunch Protection Act, which will ensure that *all foods* sold in schools during the *entire* school day are based on current, scientific, and sound nutrition standards. In the Senate, Democrat Tom Harkin and Republican Lisa Murkowski have introduced the counterpart to my bipartisan bill, which has been endorsed by more than 80 organizations, including a wide range of school, health, and nutrition advocacy groups.

While critics might expect that schools that switch to selling healthier foods might lose money, it turns out to be just the opposite! According to a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Center for Disease Control, the majority of schools switching to healthier competitive foods in their vending machines and a la carte lines actually increased revenues. The Center for Weight and Health at U.C. Berkely in 2007 also found that 65 percent of schools had total revenue increases of more than five percent after switching, proving that schools offering improved nutrition standards can increase their total revenues as well.

H.R. 1324 would require that nutrition standards for foods sold in vending machines and a la carte lines meet standards for caloric intake, saturated fats, trans fats, and refined sugars. The bill would depend on leading scientific experts to make recommendations, and would study the relationship between certain foods and obesity. Additionally, while H.R. 1324 would set strong nationwide minimum standards, states could go above and beyond those standards. It's obviously long past time to bring these school food standards into the 21st Century.

Unless Congress updates these standards, students will continue to spend money on unhealthy options that undermine their health and their futures. I look forward to working with this Committee to get these changes signed into law.

Again, Madame Chair, thank you for having me.