

Testimony of Mr. Robert Keiser

on

**"The Benefits of Physical and Health Education
for Our Nation's Children"**

before the

House Committee of Education and Labor

July 24, 2008

Good Morning Chairman Miller, Ranking Member McKeon and members of the Education and Labor Committee. My name is Robert Keiser and I'm from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I would like to thank you for the honor and privilege of testifying before you today.

I am here to address the growing epidemic of childhood obesity in the United States and to shed some light on my personal struggle with obesity.

According to the Center for Disease Control, a staggering 25.6% of Americans reported being obese in 2007. According to the American Heart Association, in 2004, over 9 million children and adolescents ages 6 to 19 were considered overweight. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that by 2010, 20 percent of children in the U.S. will be obese. Overweight adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming overweight adults.

The experts here today can describe the various risks and expenditures associated with obesity. But I am here today because I believe that, by sharing my own personal story, I may help you find ways to help other children overcome their struggles with obesity.

As a child I was overweight. I did not have physical education classes in elementary school. Like so many of America's youth, I spent countless hours in my room playing

video games and eating junk food, even though my parents provided healthy food choices. Even though I was an active child and was involved in many sports, this physical activity was not sufficient to overcome the vicious cycle I was falling into.

One day my mother contacted a local gym and asked me to enroll with her in weight training and fitness classes. Reluctantly I agreed and I credit her for encouraging me to take the first step in changing my life forever.

After years of video games and poor food choices, I began a weekly workout regimen. At first I went to the gym two to three times each week, increasing to four and five times a week as I got more comfortable. I began noticing small changes in my body, but I realized I was still not where I wanted to be.

My trainer, Manny Mair, a former member of the United States Marine Corps and licensed fitness trainer, evolved into a second father figure for me. I made a personal commitment to take the steps necessary to lead a healthy lifestyle. It is a decision that has positively affected every aspect of my life. I became involved in boxing and weight training which established a set regimen for my daily activities. Manny also created a nutrition program for me that consisted of healthy choices. Through intense training and a commitment to eating healthy food, I lost over 30 pounds.

This experience changed every aspect of my life for the better and I finally broke the vicious cycle. During my freshman and sophomore years I hovered around a 3.5 GPA. I

played football during middle school but my weight prevented me from playing during my freshman and sophomore years at Pine Crest because the conditioning was too hard and I didn't want to feel embarrassed or inadequate. After losing the weight, I achieved my life-long dream in my junior and senior years when teammates chose me as co-captain of the Pine Crest Panthers football team. I had more energy and I didn't feel tired all the time. And my GPA increased to a high of 4.3.

More important than these accomplishments, I saw how losing weight had changed my life. My personal triumph over obesity changed how I viewed myself. It made me happier, and more confident and successful at school. In fact, meeting this personal challenge head on has given me the confidence to speak before you today.

Having won my own battle, I wanted to help other kids overcome their struggles with obesity. I recognized that not all kids would be as fortunate as I was to have a personal trainer to turn to for help. So I established the Legislative Advisory Teen Council of Broward County, comprised of public and private school teens united to address the many concerns of Florida's youth.

I learned that legislation had been introduced in Florida mandating 150 minutes of physical education in Florida schools grades K-5. So I led members of the teen council to Tallahassee to lobby the state's legislators in support of the bill. I testified before the K-12 committee, sharing my personal struggle with obesity, much as I am doing now.

The bill passed unanimously in the Florida House and Senate and was signed into law in May 2007.

Florida media and the American Heart Association became interested in my story and I realized that I was making a real difference. And, to top it all, I was appointed by Governor Crist as the only teen member of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness.

My personal story is one of overcoming the odds and being blessed by accomplishments. I was fortunate to have the love and support of my family, my trainer, and my friends – something not all teens have. It is my dream that children and teens who struggle with obesity don't have to face this problem alone, and that they can overcome unhealthy lifestyle habits if they have support from schools, counselors, PE teachers, and others to do so.

I think it is critical that a legislative advisory teen council is created in every state that can champion the concerns of you on this and other important issues. I'm aware of states that have established these councils and their successes are well documented. My second recommendation is that these councils have a coordinated mentoring program to assist teens and youth seeking to better their lives through physical fitness and healthy living. Learning how to be fit and healthy is an important first step in making a difference and in shaping America's future.

Mr. Chairman, esteemed members of the committee, again I want to thank you for this opportunity. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.