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SUGARY DRINK TAX LEGISLATION WILL BUBBLE UP AGAIN
Efforts to combat obesity-related health issues in Illinois will continue

SPRINGFIELD, Ill (April 29, 2014) – Despite reports to the contrary, efforts to pass the proposed state sugary drink tax will continue. The HEAL Act, a modest penny-per-ounce tax on sugary drinks, will help to fund public education on the impacts of sugar on the diet and the wide range of health effects that are caused by obesity. The proposed tax would raise an estimated $600 million in revenue that would be devoted to school and community health programs such as physical education, community gardens, farmers markets, and healthcare for low-income residents.

“The reports of the sugary drink tax’s demise are greatly exaggerated,” said Elissa Bassler, CEO of the Illinois Public Health Institute and the Executive Director of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity, which is leading the charge to pass the HEAL Act. “The issues regarding obesity-related health impacts such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke are not going away, and we are committed to continuing with our mission to promote prevention and improve public health systems that maximize health and quality of life for the people of Illinois. The passage of the HEAL Act is vital to the success of that mission.”

“Improving Illinois’ diet is the right thing to do. We need to invest in public health and obesity prevention,” said State Senator Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago). “I introduced the HEAL Act to begin a necessary conversation. I’m committed to revisiting this issue every year until we pass a law that encourages people to make healthy choices about sugary drinks.”

This year’s proposed bill was introduced by Representative Robyn Gabel (D-18th District) and Senator Mattie Hunter (D-3rd District). The statewide coalition supporting the legislation, called Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity, includes groups such as: American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition, and the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians, to name a few.

According to the Illinois Public Health Institute, there is no arguing that sugary drinks have little to no nutritional value – they are simply empty calories. So the health argument is a no-brainer. But the beverage industry has taken a page from Big Tobacco’s playbook to argue that the sugary drink tax will exact an economic toll, costing jobs and adding to already steep tax burdens. However, a recent study published in the American Journal of Public Health shows that the Illinois tax would have no significant impact on employment. In fact, when one takes into account the full economic impact of the tax, including consumers shifting to untaxed beverages (also produced and distributed by the beverage companies) and the economic activity generated by the expenditure of the tax revenue, this study shows that a proposal like the HEAL Act could result in a net increase of 4,500 jobs. Beyond jobs, another study found that the health improvements brought by the tax could reduce childhood obesity by 9.3%, diabetes by 3,400 new cases, and save taxpayers more than $150 million in state and private healthcare spending.
Sugar-sweetened beverages are the single biggest source of added sugar in the American diet. Each day, more research continues to prove the harmful and dangerous impacts of sugar. Sugar found in sugar-sweetened beverages not only raises one’s risk for chronic disease and obesity, the human and financial toll is a burden we can no longer afford.

**About Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity**
The primary goal of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity is to ensure that trends in obesity in Illinois are stable by 2015 and moving downward by 2018. The statewide coalition of over 140 organizations works to implement solutions to the obesity epidemic through coordinated and comprehensive policy, systems, and environmental changes. It is administered by the Illinois Public Health Institute. [www.preventobesityil.org](http://www.preventobesityil.org)

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