ADVOCATES VOW SUGARY DRINK TAX WILL BUBBLE UP AGAIN

Efforts to combat obesity-related health issues in Illinois will continue

SPRINGFIELD, IL (May 27, 2014) – Though previously stalled, today the House Revenue and Finance Committee considered the HEAL Act as an amendment to House Bill 397, sponsored by Representative Robyn Gabel. Though it failed to pass this time, advocates were thrilled that the House considered the legislation again, noting that their work to pass the legislation was designed to be a multi-year effort. The HEAL Act, which places a modest penny-per-ounce tax on sugary drinks, would raise an estimated $600 million that would be devoted to school and community health programs such as physical education, community gardens, farmers markets, healthy food in child care centers. It would also fund expanded prevention services for low-income residents.

“Though we wish the outcome of the hearing had been different, we are glad this bill has started a public debate on the health impacts caused by sugary drinks. The fight will continue for a healthier Illinois,” said Elissa Bassler, 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 reversing the obesity epidemic in 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 Representative Robyn Gabel (D-Evanston). “I introduced the HEAL Act to begin a necessary conversation to encourage 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). It was refiled by Rep. Gabel as House Bill 397, House Amendment 1. The Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO) is a statewide coalition that includes groups such as the Illinois Public Health Institute, American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association, Chicago Hispanic Health Coalition, and the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians, to name a few.

According to IAPO, 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. Sugar-sweetened beverages include soda, fruit, sport and energy drinks, and sweetened teas and coffees. 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-funded Wellness Fund, 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 alone 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)