

June 22, 2009

The Honorable Henry Waxman  
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2204 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-0530

Dear Chairman Waxman:

Two bills have been filed in Congress which would provide nutrition information on chain restaurant menus and menu boards. They are the Menu Education and Labeling (MEAL) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, (S.1048, H.R. 2426) and the Labeling Education and Nutrition (LEAN) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Carper and Congressman Jim Matheson (S. 558, H.R. 1398). The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) supports menu labeling, specifically the MEAL act, and urges that it be supported as a stand-alone bill or included in health system reform legislation as the Senate Health Education Labor and Pension Committee has done in its Affordable Health Choices Act, for the following reasons:

- Americans spend almost half of their food budget, and get one third of their calories, from meals and snacks eaten away from home. These foods tend to be higher in calories, saturated fat, carbohydrates, salt, and sugar, and are usually lower in fiber than foods made at home. About 1/3 of all children ages 4 – 19 eat food from fast food restaurants every day.<sup>1</sup>
- Restaurant portion sizes have increased. A portion can contain the recommended calories for an entire day.
- Studies show that eating fast food often or in large quantities is associated with a lower quality diet and may increase risk for chronic disease and obesity.<sup>2</sup>

Consumers need to know what they are eating in order to make healthier choices. Most people underestimate how many calories are in food items. Even professional nutritionists underestimate the calorie content of restaurant foods, because the foods are so surprisingly high in calories compared to foods prepared at home.

The 1990 National Labeling and Education Act helps consumers know what is in the food they buy at the grocery store. Since so many people eat out more often, and frequently at chain restaurants, it is important to have some key information readily available at the point of purchase.

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, J.F., B.-H. Lin, and E. Frazao. "Role of Food Prepared Away from Home in the American Diet, 1977-78 versus 1994-96: Changes and Consequences." *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. 34(2002): 140-150.

<sup>2</sup> Stender S, Dyerberg J, Astrup A. (2007). Fast food: unfriendly and unhealthy. *International Journal of Obesity*, 31:887- 890.

Consumers support menu labeling. In New York City, where menu labeling has been in effect for almost one year, consumers are in favor of it and a vast majority uses this information to help them make better choices.<sup>3</sup>

There are key differences between the bills which SNE wishes to highlight:

- Placement of information: MEAL mandates that the information be placed on menus and menu boards, and LEAN would allow the information to be in several locations including menus and menu boards. SNE supports the provision in the MEAL Act. The Rudd Center at Yale University recently conducted a study to see if people access nutrition information from pamphlets or posters in the restaurant. Out of the 4,311 fast food customers they observed, only six accessed nutrition information that was available in that form. These findings suggest that in order to influence customer purchasing, the information must be displayed on menu boards and menus.<sup>4</sup>
- Statement on daily recommended number of calories: SNE supports the provision in the MEAL Act that would require a statement on menus and menu boards letting people know how many calories are recommended each day. This important information can help customers compare calories in various foods to make the best selection to fit their daily needs. LEAN directs restaurants to post this information on the menu or board only if the calories are not listed there. Listings for the grams of saturated fat plus trans fat; grams of carbohydrate; and milligrams of sodium must also be posted.

SNE views menu labeling as a way to increase awareness of the calorie content of foods sold in chain restaurants, and a strategy for increasing interest in nutrition and nutrition education programs. SNE urges you to co-sponsor and support the MEAL Act, to help improve the health of the American people.

Thank you, and if you want more information or input from SNE, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



Martha Archuleta, PhD, RD  
President, Society for Nutrition Education

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<sup>3</sup> Technomic, Inc. (February 2009). Update: Consumer reaction to calorie disclosure on menus/menu boards in New York City. Project #13267

<sup>4</sup> Roberto, C. A., Agnew, H., & Brownell, K. D. (2009). An Observational Study of Consumers' Accessing of Nutrition Information in Chain Restaurants. *Am J Public Health*, 99(5), 820-821.

June 22, 2009

The Honorable Joe Barton  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2109 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-4306

Dear Representative Barton:

Two bills have been filed in Congress which would provide nutrition information on chain restaurant menus and menu boards. They are the Menu Education and Labeling (MEAL) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, (S.1048, H.R. 2426) and the Labeling Education and Nutrition (LEAN) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Carper and Congressman Jim Matheson (S. 558, H.R. 1398). The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) supports menu labeling, specifically the MEAL act, and urges that it be supported as a stand-alone bill or included in health system reform legislation as the Senate Health Education Labor and Pension Committee has done in its Affordable Health Choices Act, for the following reasons:

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Consumers support menu labeling. In New York City, where menu labeling has been in effect for almost one year, consumers are in favor of it and a vast majority uses this information to help them make better choices.<sup>7</sup>

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June 22, 2009

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman, Health Subcommittee  
237 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-3006

Dear Chairman Pallone:

Two bills have been filed in Congress which would provide nutrition information on chain restaurant menus and menu boards. They are the Menu Education and Labeling (MEAL) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, (S.1048, H.R. 2426) and the Labeling Education and Nutrition (LEAN) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Carper and Congressman Jim Matheson (S. 558, H.R. 1398). The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) supports menu labeling, specifically the MEAL act, and urges that it be supported as a stand-alone bill or included in health system reform legislation as the Senate Health Education Labor and Pension Committee has done in its Affordable Health Choices Act, for the following reasons:

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June 22, 2009

The Honorable Nathan Deal  
Health Subcommittee  
2133 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515-1010

Dear Representative Deal:

Two bills have been filed in Congress which would provide nutrition information on chain restaurant menus and menu boards. They are the Menu Education and Labeling (MEAL) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, (S.1048, H.R. 2426) and the Labeling Education and Nutrition (LEAN) Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Carper and Congressman Jim Matheson (S. 558, H.R. 1398). The Society for Nutrition Education (SNE) supports menu labeling, specifically the MEAL act, and urges that it be supported as a stand-alone bill or included in health system reform legislation as the Senate Health Education Labor and Pension Committee has done in its Affordable Health Choices Act, for the following reasons:

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June 22, 2009

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy  
Chairman, Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy:

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June 22, 2009

The Honorable Michael B. Enzi  
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee  
379A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Enzi:

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