



March 26, 2010

TO: Councilmember Mary M. Cheh, Chair
Members Committee on Government Operations and the Environment
Chairman Vincent C. Gray, Chair
Members Committee of the Whole

FROM: Bonita M. Pennino
Government Relations Director

SUBJECT: B18-564 Healthy Schools Act of 2009

The American Cancer Society is the nationwide community-based voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives and diminishing suffering from cancer. **A priority of the American Cancer Society is to encourage individuals to adopt a healthy lifestyle beginning at a young age.**

As one component in addressing the obesity issue facing the District of Columbia and to help reduce the risk of cancer later in life, the Society strongly urges the passing of legislation requiring the DC public Schools to address the youth obesity epidemic by raising school nutritional requirements to meet national standards, increasing the amount of time dedicated to physical activity in grades 1 through 12, and establishing progressive healthy school policies. The Society also recommends improving the overall health of DC public school students by adopting 100% tobacco-free school policies.

Obesity, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition are major risk factors for cancer, second only to tobacco use. One third of the over half million cancer deaths every year are related to poor diet, inactivity, and obesity. Tobacco use is linked to 30% of all cancer deaths.

**We have the knowledge and capacity to reduce the cancer burden
by at least 50% by preventing cancer.**

To reduce the risk of developing cancer the Society encourages individuals to adopt a healthy lifestyle, including sixty minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity at least five days per week, eating five or more servings of vegetables and fruits each day, choosing whole grains foods, limiting consumption of high fat red meats, avoiding smoking and limiting the consumption of alcohol. Since most lifestyle patterns are established early in life, it's essential to start teaching children to develop healthy habits at a young age.

- more -

The Society's specific recommendations are:

- The school food nutrition standards should refer to US Department of Health and Human Services, US Department of Agriculture Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005.
- Physical education standards should extend beyond eight-grade up through high school graduation. Similar to the nutrition standards, the Society recommends referring to nationally recognized physical education standards, such as the Joint Committee on National Health Education Standards.
- School health and wellness policies be in accordance with the 2004 Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act.
- Lastly, the Society strongly recommends the adoption of 100% tobacco free schools policy. Although smoke-free schools policies exist in the District of Columbia, the Society believes these policies do not provide the District of Columbia students comprehensive protection from the harmful effects of tobacco use. Specifically, the Society recommends
 - Prohibit the use of all tobacco products at all off campus events, in school vehicles, and at school functions,
 - Expand existing policy to include all faculty, staff, parents, and visitors in addition to students,
 - Prohibit all tobacco advertising and promotion on clothing, accessories and in school sponsorship, and
 - Provide access and referral to cessation programs for students and staff.

Research studies provide evidence that promoting and establishing healthy behaviors for younger people is more effective, and often easier, than efforts to change unhealthy behaviors already established in adults. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Healthy Youth* initiative and the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, schools can play a vital role in establishing healthy behavior patterns among young people that carry over into adulthood.

The American Cancer Society urges City Councilmembers to provide the District of Columbia students the foundation to become healthy adults by passing legislation that comprehensively addresses reducing cancer risks.