

SB 120 (Padilla)

Food Facilities: Nutritional Information

Background

The 1990 Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA) requires food manufacturers to provide nutrition information on nearly all packaged foods. However, NLEA exempts restaurants.

Approximately one half of the largest chain restaurants do not provide any nutrition information about their foods to their customers. At most restaurants, people can only guess the nutritional quality of the food.

The current system of voluntary labeling at restaurants is inadequate given the large role that restaurant foods play in Americans' diets.



Problem

Obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of our time.

Obesity rates in adults doubled over the last twenty years. Currently, two-thirds of American adults (65%) are overweight or obese. The percentage of seriously overweight children tripled in the past two decades (from 4% to 15%).

Obesity is a major risk factor for many health problems, including heart disease, which is the leading cause of death in the United States, diabetes, and some cancers. Poor nutrition is one of the chief causes of obesity and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have identified poor nutrition as one of the major risk factors in these diseases.

Americans are increasingly relying on restaurants to feed themselves and their families. In 1970, Americans spent just 26% of their food dollars on foods prepared outside the home, like restaurant meals; today the amount is 46%.

Studies have found a positive association between eating out and higher caloric intakes and body weights. For example, children eat almost twice as many calories when they eat a meal at a restaurant (770 calories) as at home (420 calories).

Most restaurants provide a range of food choices – including “healthy choices,” however without nutritional information, it is difficult to compare options and make informed decisions.

Basic nutritional information is extremely important to consumers who are dealing with chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease and diabetes

Solution

This bill requires each restaurant that is part of a large chain to provide nutritional information on standard menu items. Specifically, the number of calories must be posted on menu boards and on print menus, the number of calories, grams of saturated fat plus trans fat, sodium, and carbohydrates must be listed.

Such information, clearly displayed at the point of decision, will help consumers to make more informed choices at restaurants and is an important strategy for reducing obesity and protecting the nation's health.

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