

May 12, 2009

To: State of Michigan House Health Policy Committee

From: Charity Simpkins, MS, RD  
President, Michigan Dietetic Association

My name is Charity Simpkins. I am a dietitian and the President of the Michigan Dietetic Association. I represent over 2100 dietitians who live and work in Michigan. Our mission is to promote optimal nutrition and well being for all people in the state of Michigan.

I want to thank you for allowing me to address why educating on healthy habits is important.

The majority of work that a dietitian and nutritionist is involved in is in the treatment and prevention of chronic diseases by providing medical nutrition therapy. Approximately 30% of dietitians are employed in hospitals, but they also work for HMOs, private practice or other health-care facilities. In addition, a large number of dietitians work in community and public health settings and academia and research. A growing number of dietitians work in the food and nutrition industry, in business, journalism, sports nutrition, corporate wellness programs and other non-traditional work settings. You will see dietitians working in dialysis centers, burn clinics, and neo-natal care settings, as nutrition therapy is an integral part of recovery and care for these patients.

There are three key issues that underscore why dietitians should be a part of the team combating childhood obesity:

**1. Michigan residents deserve to know which individuals in Michigan are qualified by education, experience, and examination to provide quality nutrition information.**

Dietitians and Nutritionists, as healthcare professionals, practice using evidence-based guidelines which are scientifically based. We assess, make recommendations, and work collaboratively with our patients or clients. We work with other healthcare professionals to optimize care for our clients/patients and to build meal plans that work with busy schedules.

**2. Registered Dietitians can teach behavior change.**

According to a survey by the Department of Health and Human Services CDC, eighty three percent of Michigan high school students consume fruits and vegetables less than five times per day during a survey in 2007. Twenty nine percent drink a can, bottle, or glass of soda or pop (not including diet soft drinks) at least one time per day in 2007. Energy drinks are becoming more popular with today's youth and are providing more empty calories.

Registered dietitians learn behavior modification during our course of undergraduate study. These behavior modification techniques will help to decrease long term complications from many disease states like diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure.

### **3. Healthy habits started early will stay.**

By beginning behavior modification and good nutrition at an early age, these children will grow up to be healthier, happier individuals. We develop our nutritional and physical activity behaviors at an early age and registered dietitians with our science based practice guidelines can be a wonderful resource in teaching habits that will stick throughout the lifespan.

Thank you,

Charity Simpkins, MS, RD