



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

January 23, 2008

The Honorable Marilyn Rasmussen, Chair
Agriculture & Rural Economic Development Committee
409 Legislative Building
PO Box 40402
Olympia, Washington 98504-0402

Dear Senator Rasmussen:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to support the concept of Senate Bill 6483, which is scheduled to be heard by your committee tomorrow. The bill would create a grant program to help at least 75 schools purchase Washington-grown fresh fruits and vegetables. The grants would go to schools serving students in kindergarten through eighth grade, with preference given to schools in which 50% or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. In addition, the bill contains measures intended to make fresh fruits and vegetables more accessible for some low-income adults and families.

This program is not funded in the Governor's budget and the Board does not have the expertise to comment on technical aspects of this complex legislation. The Board, however, supports policy approaches that will improve opportunities for healthy nutrition, especially for children and for people who live in communities with restricted access to healthy foods.

According to the 2004 Healthy Youth Survey, about half of eighth graders in Washington State eat three or fewer servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Just over a fourth of the eighth graders surveyed reported eating five or more servings. These findings, along with the data we have on the numbers of children who are obese or overweight, suggest there is ample room for improvement in children's consumption of healthy foods.

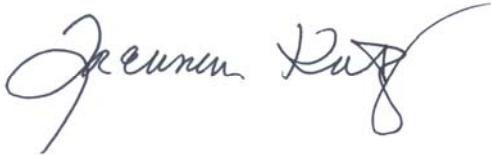
One of the Board's strategic goals is to promote policies that address the link between health disparities and academic achievement. A large study conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2003 found that teachers at schools serving free fruits and vegetables reported that their students' attention increased as a result of the program. Participating schools included students from diverse ethnic backgrounds and family income levels.

More research is needed but there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that healthy eating habits acquired in the younger grades are retained as the student gets older. There are informal reports that suggest that students who attended Shaw Middle School in Spokane (which offered free fresh fruits and vegetables) were more apt to eat fruits and vegetables during their high school years than peers from other schools.

In short, the Board believes this general policy approach has the potential to enhance the nutritional status of students, which can lead to improvements in health and learning readiness. I am also pleased to note that this bill has the potential to expand nutritional opportunities in communities without easy access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables and to strengthen the economic viability of Washington farms.

Thank you for considering this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Treuman Katz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Treuman" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Katz".

Treuman Katz
Chair

cc: Agriculture & Rural Economic Development Committee Members
The Honorable Brian Hatfield, State Senate
The Honorable Brian Blake, House of Representatives
The Honorable Eric Pettigrew, House of Representatives
State Board of Health Members
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Mary Beth Lang, Washington State Department of Agriculture
Ms. Isabel Munoz-Colon, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Mr. Brian Peyton, Department of Health
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, State Board of Health
Ms. Tara Wolff, State Board of Health