

NACCHO

National Association of County & City Health Officials

The National Connection for Local Public Health

September 20, 2011

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On behalf of the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), I am writing to express our disappointment at the disapproval of the two-year pilot program proposed by New York State and New York City, under which sugar-sweetened beverages could not be purchased with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds. This pilot program and its evaluation would provide invaluable information for health departments across the nation, which are seeking ways to reduce the vast and growing burden of chronic disease in their communities.

NACCHO is the national organization representing the nation's 2,800 local governmental health departments. These city, county, metropolitan, district, and tribal departments work every day to protect and promote health and well-being for all people in their communities.

New York City has been a national leader and innovator in chronic disease prevention. The SNAP waiver proposal was one of a series of steps the City has taken to create a policy environment that promotes healthy behaviors, particularly among low-income populations that suffer disproportionately from illness, disability, and premature death due to diabetes and heart disease, for which obesity is a prime cause. The national costs of obesity, in excess medical care, lost productivity, and diminished quality of life, are staggering.

NACCHO shares New York's view that a comprehensive approach to reducing the obesity epidemic is essential to the future well-being of the nation, and that reducing the SNAP subsidy for sugar-sweetened beverages is one potentially powerful dimension of such an approach. The pilot program would have promoted healthy behaviors for SNAP recipients at little or no cost to taxpayers. It is also essential that states, cities and counties be given the latitude to experiment, and in this case at no additional cost to USDA, and develop a research base for public health solutions that can be replicated in other parts of the country.

We appreciate the important work of the USDA and look forward to working with you to ensure that all Americans have access to safe and nutritious food.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Pestronk
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Kevin Concannon, Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
The Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor, New York City
Dr. Thomas Farley, Health Commissioner, New York City

