

FoodChange

Nutrition. Education. Financial Empowerment.

Testimony of
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New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Board of Health

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Support to amend Article 81 of the New York City Health Code to make information on calorie content of menu items clear to consumers at the time of ordering at Food Service Establishments where such information is publicly available (sec 81.08).

And

Support to amend Article 81 of the New York City Health code to allow for artificial trans fat to be phased out of city licensed Food Service establishments (sec 81.50).

Good Morning. My name is Kate MacKenzie, and I am the Director of Food and Nutrition at FoodChange. FoodChange is a twenty-six year old non-profit organization that improves lives through nutrition, education, and financial empowerment.

Thank you for holding this hearing to not only provide public comment about the two proposed amendments to the New York City Health Code, but also for allowing the community to request recommendations for implementation.

FoodChange fully supports making calorie information known to consumers. This information is already widely available, but not easily accessible. Typically such information is available via a website or occasionally in a small print brochure if requested. The increasing rates of overweight and obesity presents a significant threat to the current and future public health of the city. While food choices clearly are not the only cause for these conditions, they are a large contributor. Providing consumers with calorie information about food choices can lead to informed choice. Think to yourself. How many times have you eaten out in the last week? The majority of New Yorkers get at least one third or more of their calories from food eaten away from home. Even when we think we know the nutritional value (including calories) of the foods we choose, the reality is, we do not. As a result, too many people are consuming too many calories, and without adequate energy expenditure. This leads to weight gain. One pound of weight gain is equal to an excess of 3500 calories. This sounds like a lot, but when

you consider a large soda that may contain as many as 600 calories, you can see that it isn't that hard for the excess calories to add up.

Providing this service to New Yorkers is a significant approach to reducing rates of overweight and obesity. When paired with strong nutrition education, this amendment has the potential to transform the long-term health of many New Yorkers.

To this point, nutrition education alone has not been an overwhelmingly effective means of informing food choice, primarily because the food environment has not allowed for health-promoting food choices. Clearly displaying calorie content will enhance the food environment in restaurants, so consumers can more easily make an informed choice.

Section 81.50 of the Health Code would restrict NYC food service establishments from using artificial trans fats, with the exception of foods served in the manufacturers' original sealed packages. Again, FoodChange offers its full support for this amendment. The evidence is clear and sound that consumption of trans fat not only increases LDL cholesterol levels, but decreases HDL levels. This in turn increases the risk of heart disease.

It is important to note that trans fat can feasibly be replaced with alternative items. The Health Department should be commended for implementing their Trans Fat Education Campaign, which aimed to encourage Food Service Establishments to voluntarily switch to trans-fat free oils and shortenings. Because of the campaign's limited success, the department is taking the next necessary step toward eliminating artificial trans fat from the city.

Removing trans fats will lower the risk of disease for anyone who eats out in New York City – and that's just about everyone – but especially for people who are dependent on inexpensive and highly processed food. Lower disease rates, in turn, will likely lower medical costs to the City associated with nutrition-related disease risk factors.

In addition to our support for section 81.50, FoodChange encourages the Board of Health to take special consideration about implementation in free feeding programs, especially within the emergency food system.

It is well known that soup kitchens in particular are in fact not “emergency” sources of food for their recipients, but rather, they are regular and necessary. These food service establishments obtain their food through City EFAP, State HPNAP, and Federal TEFAP dollars, in addition to donations. Technically, food coming into soup kitchens from each of these sources would have to be free of artificial trans fats. This idea, and its potential reality is brilliant, yet its practicality is slim, at best. However, if it is accomplished, New York City could revolutionize the emergency food system of the country, by slowing the influx of foods of poor nutritional value into this system which feeds vulnerable consumers.

Given that soup kitchens generally do not have enough food to meet their demand,

FoodChange strongly encourages the Board of Health to consider the repercussions of further limiting this food supply.

In summary, FoodChange commends and supports the efforts the Department of Health is taking to improve the health of our residents. It is particularly timely because of the efforts the Mayor's administration and the City Council are taking to address food security, hunger, and nutrition. Collectively these strides will improve the food environment of NYC, enable New Yorkers to make informed eating choices, and demonstrate to other cities that such progressive efforts are possible and effective. I urge the Board to adopt these amendments and consider these recommendations.