



December 11, 2023

Charles County – Healthy Meals for Children

Dear County Commissioners:

I want to express my gratitude for your support on several of our amendments. However, I must highlight that a critical and burdensome aspect of the bill has yet to be addressed. Therefore, we kindly request the removal or non-mandating of the nutritional criteria outlined in the bill on page 2, lines 26 through 42.

The process of calculating nutritional content is particularly expensive for our independent restaurant members. It necessitates lab analysis or costly programs conducted by food scientists and dietitians to ensure accuracy — resources that our members lack both in terms of accessibility and financial means. As mentioned by Commissioner Stewart during the public hearing, the program employed by the Charles County Public School System for similar purposes costs well over a thousand dollars. I also urge you to consult with the Charles County Health Department, as I suspect they lack the resources needed to even enforce this aspect of the bill.

Meeting food group criteria, as specified on page 3 and 4 of the bill, is considerably more feasible for independent restaurants than adhering to specific nutrition criteria. Such a mandate would be a significant cost burden for our industry which operates on razor thin profit margins (typically 3-5% pre-tax). Many restaurants continue to struggle with rising food and labor costs, pandemic related debt, and less overall customer volume than pre-pandemic.

Simply put - passing this legislation without addressing the nutritional criteria would impose substantial costs on every local restaurant with a children's menu, amounting to thousands of dollars. We appreciate your thoughtful consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brendan J. Mahoney".

Brendan J. Mahoney
Government Affairs &
Local Grassroots Manager