



Lawrence Square
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Toronto, Ontario M6A 3B4

April 9th, 2008

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Queen's Park, Rm 281, Main Legislative Building
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

John Tory
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party
401- 19 Duncan Street
Toronto, ON M5H 3H1

Howard Hampton
Leader of the New Democratic Party
Queen's Park, Rm. 114, Main Legislative Building
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

Dear Premier, Mr. Tory and Mr. Hampton:

As representatives of thousands of health professionals across the province, the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA) and the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) urge you to support MPP Rosario Marchese's bill to prohibit the commercial advertising of food and beverages to children under thirteen years of age in Ontario.

The time for action on children's marketing is now. Ontario has seen a dramatic rise in child overweight, obesity and poor dietary habits. Among the many influences on children's diets and health, no influences have more rapidly assumed a central socializing role than media and marketing. Children today are exposed to a greater intensity and frequency of marketing messages than any previous generation. Food marketers have discovered children as a key demographic. Annually in Canada, those aged 9-14 years spend \$2.9 billion of their own money and influence another \$20 billion in household purchases.

Research shows that food advertising influences children's food preferences, purchase requests and consumption. There is strong evidence that young children lack the cognitive abilities to objectively evaluate marketing messages. The Supreme Court of Canada concluded that "advertising directed at young children is per se manipulative". Food and beverage products developed for, and advertised to, children are dominated by those that are calorie dense and nutrient poor. The budgets of food marketers are hundreds of times larger than any resources possessed by public health authorities.

We echo the opinions of other health advocates, including the Toronto Board of Health, the Center for Science in the Public Interest, and the consensus of the March 2008 Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada national conference on children's marketing, who argue that the current practice of allowing advertisers to regulate themselves is failing our children.

The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services can, and should, intervene to ensure that children are not specifically targeted with commercial advertising of any kind. We believe that Mr. Marchese's bill is an appropriate next step in that direction and in Ontario's mission to become a world leader in promoting and protecting the health of its children.

OPHA represents over 3,000 public health practitioners through individual memberships and 10 constituent societies. We actively promote child health and well-being, as well as access to affordable, nutritious and personally acceptable foods for all Ontarians. The association's mission is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health. OSNPPH is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians in public health representing over 170 members from every health unit in the province. Our members are specialists in applied human nutrition, members of the College of Dietitians of Ontario, and focus on health promotion and disease prevention. The society's mission is to provide a leadership forum and official voice for public health nutrition practice in Ontario.

Our organizations look forward to participating in the implementation of this work.

Sincerely,



President
Ontario Public Health Association



Chair
Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals
in Public Health

cc: Hon. Ted McMeekin, Minister of Government and Consumer Services
Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education
Hon. Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion
Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Julia Munro, Critic for Children and Youth Services
Laurie Scott, Critic for Health Promotion
Rosario Marchese, NDP Caucus Chair