



**Memorandum in Support
(With Recommendations)
A.5763/Ortiz**

The Children's Health Fund supports provisions in A.5763 (Ortiz) that would require schools to analyze the body mass index (BMI) of school children by age. CHF concurs with the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) findings that a BMI analysis that considers the child's age is the most accurate assessment of a child being underweight, overweight, and at-risk for overweight. According to the CDC, as children grow, they experience fluctuations in their body fatness. Age specific BMI also allows for better tracking of body size beyond the puberty years and throughout life.

CHF also supports provisions that would require schools to provide parents with an explanation of the BMI analysis in the form of a letter or a report. This is a critical part of the process. Parents need to be alerted to their child's BMI, especially if the child's BMI falls in a percentile range that indicates he or she is at risk of overweight or overweight, so parents can take actions, if necessary, to address the problem. However, this information must be treated with the utmost sensitivity, as children could be hurt by the results. CHF does not believe that the BMI should be posted on report cards but, rather, in a sealed letter that is sent directly to the child's parents.

The CDC reports that 30 percent of children and adolescents are overweight or obese. In New York, 33 percent of low-income children between two and five years are overweight or at risk for becoming overweight. The obesity epidemic has given rise to co-morbidities like Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus, the most common type of diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, the most common cause of death in the United States. CHF has created a model of care to identify children at risk of overweight and serious health problems associated with being overweight.

CHF's Starting Right Initiative, which was established in 2001, identifies children and adolescents at risk of overweight and associated health problems among homogeneously at-risk populations. The program includes health, nutrition and lifestyle interventions, as well as culturally sensitive education programs. In the South Bronx, where the program is located, 44 percent of school aged children that visit CHF's South Bronx Health Center for Children and Families (SBHCCF) are at risk of over overweight or overweight.

CHF believes that measures like A.5763 will help prevent or delay the onset of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus and other morbidities by enabling parents to intervene sooner rather than later, thus providing better health outcomes for children. The Starting Right Initiative has given CHF hands on experience in effectively identifying and managing children who are overweight and also knowledge about what strategies work best. CHF works closely with parents to help them make better health choices for their children. Through experience, CHF realizes that successful intervention hinges on parents understanding their child's health situation. All Starting Right Initiative education materials are culturally sensitive, multi-lingual, and at an appropriate reading level.

CHF suggests that the Legislature consider requiring that all information provided to parents is culturally sensitive and use the Arkansas model to alert parents about their child's BMI. The Arkansas letter explains why parents should be concerned about their child's BMI, whether the child has a weight problem, what BMI means and recommendations about improving nutrition and physical activity. The final iteration of the Arkansas letter was a result of input from various child advocate groups and parents. In addition to requiring the Commissioners of Education and Health to consult with each other to develop regulations for measuring, analyzing and reporting BMI, the Assembly legislation should also direct that state agencies receive input from education and child advocates.

As lawmakers grapple with how to address numerous health concerns in this country, CHF applauds the leadership of Assembly Member Ortiz and co-sponsors of this legislation to prevent the devastating health consequences associated with overweight children. We need to invest in our children's well being now. For the aforementioned reasons we urge you to support A.5763 and consider our recommendations.

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The Children's Health Fund (CHF) was founded by singer/songwriter Paul Simon and pediatrician/child advocate Irwin Redlener, MD in 1987. CHF is committed to providing health care to homeless and other medically underserved children and families through the development of innovative programs and the promotion of guaranteed access to health care. Shortly after its inception, CHF launched its first program, the New York Children's Health Project, which delivers medical care to homeless children and families through a state of the art mobile medical unit. CHF has replicated the program model with 17 projects that make up the National Network throughout the United States. Over 300,000 medically underserved children have received medical care through the National Network.