

Council of the District of Columbia
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004

COUNCILMEMBER BRIANNE K. NADEAU, CHAIRPERSON
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

ANNOUNCES A PUBLIC HEARING ON

B24-0166, THE “NUTRITION EQUITY AMENDMENT ACT OF 2021”

Wednesday, May 19, 2021, 10 a.m.
Virtual Public Hearing via Zoom

**Streamed live at www.dccouncil.us, www.entertainment.dc.gov, and
<https://www.brianneknadeau.com/committee>**

On Wednesday, May 19, 2021, Councilmember Brianne K. Nadeau, Chairperson of the Committee on Human Services, will convene a public hearing to consider Title I of Bill 24-0166, the “Nutrition Equity Amendment Act of 2021.” The hearing will be held virtually via the Zoom platform beginning at 10:00 a.m.

Over the last year, and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, health disparities in the District have become even more apparent than before. Communities of color have been hit disproportionately hard by COVID-19. Black, indigenous, and Latino people have died from COVID-19 at a higher rate than white people. Nationwide, Black people have died at 1.4 times the rate of white people.

These disparities are occurring in part due to the structural discrimination and racism that has limited access to healthcare for communities of color, and the fact these communities are disproportionately represented in essential frontline jobs that increases exposure to the virus. It is also the case that Black Americans have higher rates of underlying conditions, including diabetes and heart disease, that are linked to more severe cases of COVID-19.

The District can no longer wait to address these health disparities head on. It must identify areas where public health interventions and investments can make a difference in the health and lives of our communities. One such area is the food offered in the District’s homeless services system. Many of the District’s residents experiencing homelessness have chronic health conditions and are at risk of or have experienced food insecurity. Given these vulnerabilities, it is essential that District shelters and transitional housing facilities provide nutritious, high-quality food.

The unhealthy consumption of sugary drinks is another area where a public health intervention would be beneficial. Sugary drinks, like sports drinks and soda, represent a real health risk to kids.

Scientific evidence shows that sugary drinks are a major contributor to increasing rates of heart disease and diabetes. Additionally, there are major differences in how the beverage industry targets communities of color and the impact it has on the health of these communities. Black children and teens see more than twice as many TV ads for sugary drinks as their white peers. Moreover, residents living in the lowest income neighborhoods have the most limited access to healthy drinks and full-service grocery options.

The “Nutrition Equity Amendment Act of 2021” would improve the nutritional content and quality of food served at the District’s shelters and transitional housing facilities by requiring that meals served are consistent with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and by requiring greater oversight over food service vendors. In addition, it would establish grants to support nutrition education, cooking lessons, gardens, and play structures at family shelters and transitional housing facilities. This legislation takes important steps toward providing equitable access to healthy environments and nutritious food for all District residents experiencing homelessness.

This legislation also repeals the current sales tax on sugary drinks, and instead imposes an excise tax on the distribution of sugary drinks in the District. It aims to reduce the consumption of sugary drinks and encourages the beverage industry to produce and promote healthier options. Similar excise taxes have proven to reduce sales and consumption of sugary drinks in other jurisdictions.¹ The revenue raised by the excise will be invested directly in communities that are most impacted by health disparities. These investments were determined by a working group consisting of members of communities that face health disparities and community health advocates.

The Committee invites the public to testify or to submit written testimony. Anyone wishing to testify at the hearing should complete the witness form at <https://www.brianneknadeau.com/testify> or call the Committee on Human Services at 202-724-8170, by **close of business on Friday, May 14, 2021.**

Witnesses who anticipate needing language interpretation, or requiring sign language interpretation, are requested to inform the Human Services Committee office of the need as soon as possible, but **no later than five (5) business days before the proceeding.** We will make every effort to fulfill timely requests, however requests received in less than five (5) business days may not be fulfilled and alternatives may be offered.

Length provided for oral testimony will be determined based on the number of registered witnesses and the time allotted for the hearing; more information will be provided by the Committee after confirming your registration, but the Committee customarily permits five minutes for the first individual testifying on behalf of an organization and three minutes for any subsequent organizational witnesses and individuals testifying on their own behalf. Witnesses are encouraged

¹ News Release, *Philadelphia Tax on Sweetened Drinks Led to Drop in Sales*, PENN MEDICINE NEWS, July 8, 2020, <https://www.pennmedicine.org/news/news-releases/2020/july/philadelphia-tax-on-sweetened-drinks-led-to-drop-in-sales>; and Kara Manke, *Three years into soda tax, sugary drink consumption down more than 50 percent in Berkeley*, BERKELEY NEWS, Feb. 21, 2019, <https://news.berkeley.edu/2019/02/21/three-years-into-soda-tax-sugary-drink-consumption-down-more-than-50-percent-in-berkeley/>.

to submit a copy of their testimony electronically to humanservices@dccouncil.us in advance of the hearing.

For witnesses who are unable to testify at the hearing, written statements will be made part of the official record. Copies of written statements should be submitted either to the Committee at humanservices@dccouncil.us or to Nyasha Smith, Secretary to the Council, 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Suite 5, Washington, D.C. 20004. Additionally, voicemail testimony can be provided for the record by calling the Committee's unique voicemail number – 202-350-1927. At the beginning of the message please state and spell your name clearly, provide the name of the organization you are representing and title (if any), the topic of your testimony, and then begin your testimony.

The record will close for all forms of testimony at the end of the business day on Wednesday, May 26, 2021.