

February 14, 2005

To: House Education Committee  
From: Cliff Christian, Governmental Affairs Director  
Subject: Testimony in Support of HJ 17 (Representative McAlpin)

Obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of our time. "This is reflected in the enormous amount of coverage given to the issue in the media, and by policymakers and public health officials." Obesity rates among American adults increased 60 percent between 1991 and 2000 — and rates doubled in children over the last 20 years. If these trends continue, obesity will overtake smoking as the nation's leading cause of preventable death, according to U.S. Surgeon General's office. "This is clearly an epidemic needing legislative solutions at all levels."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that if all physically inactive Americans became active, we'd save \$77 billion in annual medical costs.<sup>o</sup> State legislators across the country have begun to take the lead in addressing the obesity epidemic. In Texas, the State Board of Education passed a rule requiring 135 minutes per week of organized physical activity in grades K-6. This follows a bill the affiliate helped pass through the legislature last session, which gave the board the authority to take this action.<sup>o</sup> Colorado legislators declared the first week of May 2002 and each first week of May thereafter to be Shape Up Across Colorado Week to educate Coloradans about the health benefits of regular physical activity and to encourage all people in the state to make exercise a part of their lives. Funding was increased in Maryland for bike paths and sidewalks in certain "Smart Growth" areas, which will increase the opportunity for residents to be physically active. Mississippi will improve the health of state students through the creation of a physical activity coordinator to be housed at the Department of Education. The legislation also recommends 30 minutes of quality physical education daily for grades K-6 and two hours a week for grades 7-9.

The American Heart Association applauds these legislators for bringing proactive efforts to their states. These are simple solutions with results that will last a lifetime. But, we really don't need to look outside our state for good examples. If you look at Montana's Health Enhancement standards, found under OPI, I believe you would come to the same conclusion that the American Heart Association did. That is, Montana is well positioned in our Nation's fight against childhood obesity (on paper). The standards are well thought out and if, consistently, enforced by local school boards, Montana would probably be leading the Nation against this battle. But that is the rub. OPI can establish the standards, but, unfortunately, locally elected school boards, faced with an on slot of budget and curricula demands from local, state and national organizations, simply are not implementing the programs necessary to comply with these standards. Personally, I don't believe these principles will ever be fully implemented until this State looks at our priorities.

Priorities developed and owned by the entire community surrounding the curricula of a school day need to be re-thought. Is the current school day long enough? Should we consider all year schools? How about requiring ten minutes of physical education prior to each class (in addition to regular physical education classes)? Do our schools need to be farm teams for college sports, developing only the most proficient athletes or should we develop low cost sports programs where schools might have enough basketball, soccer, volleyball and/or football teams to allow the entire school population to participate at the students level. The Helena school sports programs, for instance, could be composed of units of 100 or so students. These students would then compete in sporting events against other Helena teams or Townsend, Boulder, Cascade or even Lincoln. Would logistics be a problem? Yes. I submit the need more than surpasses any hassles. Could costs increase? Not if we eliminate the enormous travel budgets for our current sports system. Could the physical education programs explode? Not with adequate safeguards. Parents, Big Brother & Big Sisters, the Boys and Girls Club organizations can all be included in this new all inclusive physical education concept. Pie in the sky? Not if we have the collective will to look outside the box, to resist pressure from the entrenched system and to honestly engage the community about the true needs of all students in our schools. Imagine what a well developed physical education program could do for the self-esteem of all the students participating at their ability levels. And, remember, obesity will soon become Montana's top killer of our people.

We must reverse this obesity scourge. Emphasis on physical education in our schools alone will not accomplish the reversal - although it will be a very good beginning. We need a collective rethink on our eating habits and our free time activities. Will it be a huge task? Yes, but we didn't get here overnight and we will not reverse obesity tomorrow. We all know how to eat an elephant (and I better add donkey for this venue). We do it one bite at a time. Let's look at re-invigorating our school physical education programs as the first bite.

**Montana Office of Public Instruction  
2004 School Health Profiles Report  
Overall Principal/Teacher Results\***

	<b>Percent</b>
<b>HEALTH EDUCATION</b>	
Percent of schools that require health education for students in any of grades 6-12	95
<b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</b>	
Percent of schools that require physical education for students in any of grades 6-12	99
Among schools that require a health education course, percent that teach physical activity and fitness	100
Among schools that require a health education course, percent that teach about developing an individualized physical activity plan	71
Percent of schools in which the lead health education teacher received staff development during the past 2 years on physical activity and fitness	55
Percent of schools in which a newly hired physical education teacher or specialist is required to be certified, licensed, or endorsed by the state in physical education	93
Percent of schools that offer students intramural activities or physical activity clubs	59
Among schools that offer intramural activities or physical activity clubs, percent that provide transportation home for students who participate in after-school intramural activities or physical activity clubs	13