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## DC Voices for MEAL Choices

*A MEAL choice is an informed choice*

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### TALKING POINTS

#### Who we are:

- DC Voices for Meal Choices is a committee of the Metro Washington Public Health Association (MWPCHA) advocating for menu labeling in Washington DC
- We believe residents and visitors of the nation's capital have a right to know how many calories they consume when eating at restaurants throughout the city
- We believe that having nutrition information will allow consumers to make healthier choices when purchasing prepared foods, and will lead to increased health in the community

#### What is the DC Menu Education and Labeling (MEAL) Act?

- Introduced by council members Phil Mendelson (At-large) and Marion Barry (Ward 8) in March 2007
- Requires restaurants with 10 or more locations nationwide to provide nutrition information on their menus (calorie content, saturated fat, trans fat, carbohydrates, and sodium)
- Menu boards would only be required to display calorie count

#### Why does DC need menu labeling?

- Over half of adults in the District qualify as overweight or obese, and nearly one quarter qualify as obese
- Obesity increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and certain types of cancer
- Adults, adolescents and children who frequently eat in restaurants are more likely to be obese due to increased consumption of fat, sodium, and nutrient-poor junk food than those who eat out less frequently
- Access to nutrition information at the time of purchase will empower consumers to make healthier food choices
- 45 percent of American adults say restaurants are an essential part of their lifestyle, and nearly half of American's food budget is spent on eating away from home. The same nutritional information available at the grocery store should be available when eating out.

#### Does menu labeling really work?

- The New York City Department of Health projected that menu labeling in the City will prevent at least 30,000 new cases of diabetes over the next five years.
- 82% of New Yorkers say that menu labeling affects their food choices
- Californians can now avoid more than two pounds of weight gain per year and drop millions of pounds annually

### Organizations lobbying against the Act:

- Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington (RAMW)
- National Restaurant Association (NRA)
- The Center for Consumer Freedom

### What our opponents say:

- They claim to support "increased education not increased regulation"
  - **We say:** Menu labeling is a part of education! Implementing this policy through legislation will create a uniform set of regulations for the entire District; so all businesses will be on equal footing.
- They claim that the expenses of implementing menu labeling will be high, and that this expense will be a barrier to expansion and development
  - **We say:** Most chain restaurants already provide nutrition information online, so the nutritional analysis has already been completed. Also, chain restaurants update menu boards regularly to change prices and selection. Updating menus to include nutritional information will not be any different
- They claim that consumers know that fast food is bad, and don't need nutrition information on the menu
  - **We say:** Consumers want this information—78% of Americans support menu labeling. In cities where menu labeling is already in place, consumers say that they are using this information to make healthier food choices, and that they're even willing to pay more for these healthier food options!
- They wonder: Does menu labeling work? That article in the *New York Times* said that it doesn't.
  - **We say:** The news coverage was related to an article published in *Health Affairs*, which investigated the effects of the New York City menu labeling legislation, and found that menu labeling had a minimal effect on fast food purchases. This study was very preliminary, and had a small sample size that was drawn from a non-generalizable portion of the NYC population. The study also took place before an educational campaign aimed at informing New Yorkers about the 2,000 daily calories recommendations. This study *does not* definitively demonstrate that menu labeling does not work. Further study is required, and should be used to improve menu labeling rules, not get rid of them.

For more information on the DC Meal Act and Menu Labeling visit:

[www.dcvoicesformealchoices.org](http://www.dcvoicesformealchoices.org)

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