

ROBERT F. KENNEDY INSTITUTE
OF COMMUNITY AND FAMILY MEDICINE

11-1705

May 18, 2016
Honorable José Huizar
Chair, Planning and Land Use Management Committee
City of Los Angeles
200 North Spring Street, Room 350
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Support Revision of Citywide Sign Ordinance (feel free to rephrase the support statement)
Dear Chairman Huizar and Committee members:

The Robert F. Kennedy Institute of Community and Family Medicine (RFKI), is a non-profit organization serving the Harbor/South Bay area. Our mission is "to improve the health and well-being of children and families in the Harbor South Bay communities of Los Angeles County by providing or facilitating high-quality, low-cost health, social, and human services in a culturally competent, sensitive, friendly, accessible, professional manner." We are currently working with a group of parents to improve the health of our community. Our Parent Coalition is concerned about the overabundance of billboards marketing unhealthy food and beverages in council district 15. I am writing to you on behalf of the Parent Coalition to share with you the findings of our billboard initiative and to express our support for a citywide sign ordinance that includes a strong billboard takedown ratio, such as that included in Version B+. We would also like to have included a takedown ratio that benefits all communities across the City of Los Angeles. We are confident that these changes to the current sign regulations will help progress the health of all individuals, families, and children in Los Angeles.

Our Parent Coalition started in 2014 and is made up of concerned parents, grandparents, and caregivers of children ages zero to five. The goal of our billboard initiative is to reduce the number of unhealthy food and beverage billboard advertisements in our community. We are currently working to encourage billboard companies to voluntarily display healthy or neutral messages on billboard ads instead of promoting junk food or sugary beverages, especially within 1,000 feet radius of institutions that serve children (i.e. child care centers, preschools, head starts, etc.). However, voluntary commitments can be challenging to implement and are not always sustainable. The ideal scenario would be to require billboard companies to only advertise healthy or neutral messages near child serving institutions, but we recognize that this may raise legal challenges. Therefore, we support any effort that has the potential to reduce the number of billboards overall.

Our community already experiences a disproportionate amount of environmental and health related disparities. For example, the childhood obesity rate in council district 15 is 27.8%. The childhood obesity rate in wealthier council districts is much lower. To better understand how billboards affect our community, we began by collecting community-specific data and personal anecdotes from community members. We found that our community has a disproportionate amount of billboards with persuasive messages promoting unhealthy foods and beverages, which can lead to the development of poor eating habits. One of our parents shared that even her youngest child was able to recognize brands from fast food restaurants advertised on billboards. It is challenging for parents to instill healthy eating practices when our communities are bombarded with fast food and sugary beverage advertisements at every corner.

Based on an environmental scan that we conducted earlier this year, there were more than 30 billboards within a one mile stretch of Avalon Boulevard—one of the principle roads that crosses several communities. Many of these billboards promoted unhealthy foods and beverages and were controlled by one of three billboard companies: Clear Channel, Lamar, or Outfront. For economically-disadvantaged community members looking to stretch their dollar, promises of plentiful, fast-food meals at affordable prices are enough to make anyone overlook the health risks associated with these meals.

Unfortunately, many of the billboards that were surveyed were also found to be located next to places where children learn and play. Please see the attached maps which identify the locations of child serving institutions and the locations of billboards along a stretch of Avalon Boulevard in Wilmington. The third map shows a 1,000 feet radius around child serving institutions. For billboards included in the takedown ratio, we kindly suggest that the City prioritize the takedown of billboards located within 1,000 feet of child serving institutions.

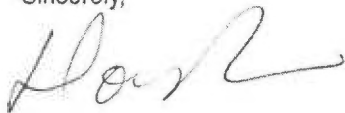
We also surveyed parents, grandparents, and caretakers of children ages zero to five and 40.8% reported that their children usually or always request fast food after seeing a fast food billboard. Many times, it is impossible for parents to avoid this request since many of the billboards are located near their child's head start, preschool, or daycare. In addition, 81.6% of caretakers reported living within five miles of a fast food billboard advertisement.

Our billboard initiative has garnered support from various prominent organizations in our community, such as the Carson-Gardena Dominguez Rotary Club, Harbor City Harbor Gateway Chamber of Commerce and the Best Start Wilmington. Recently, RFKI had the opportunity to represent the Parent Coalition and their work in front of the Planning, Land, Use, and Management (PLUM) Committee meeting on April 19 2016 at the Los Angeles City Hall. We were excited to hear that there was also strong support from others to limit billboards around parks where children would be exposed to them during play time.

On behalf of the RFKI team, Parent Collaborative, our Coalition, and the community members who we serve, I would like to thank you for taking the time to learn about our efforts to create healthier communities. We respectfully urge you to approve version B+ of the citywide sign ordinance to limit the number of billboards that residents are exposed to. Please be assured that this ordinance has the potential to create positive change for our residents

Thank you for your time and consideration. For more information, please don't hesitate to contact me at 510-508-5578.

Sincerely,



Dominga Pardo, Director
Robert F. Kennedy Institute
of Community and Family Medicine
cc: Roberto Mejia, Chief Legislative Analyst Office
Tom Rothmann, Planning Department