

May 20, 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

Dear Councilmember Huizar:

First 5 LA is a leading early childhood advocacy organization created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in Los Angeles County. First 5 LA is funding the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to work with health care providers, local communities, schools and businesses to reduce obesity prevalence among County residents. Through community-based public education, skills building, and environmental change, this countywide Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative promotes physical activity and healthful eating among the nearly one million Los Angeles County children ages zero to five and their families.

Poor dietary habits can contribute to childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes for our youngest Angelenos. The obesity rate among three and four year old children in Los Angeles County receiving services from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) was 19% in 2014, almost as high as the obesity rate among adults (24%). At the same time, research shows that food marketing influences children's food preferences, purchase requests and eating behavior. Children request and consume more unhealthy food after seeing food advertisements. As highlighted in the Marketing Matters White Paper, which we funded, there is a critical need for local policy strategies to address the unhealthy marketing of foods and beverages to children. Marketing Matters is a report that provides an overview of different local policy strategies to address unhealthy food and beverage marketing in a variety of settings. As the City of Los Angeles considers a new citywide sign ordinance to improve the regulation of billboards and digital signs, First 5 LA urges the members of the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee to consider the research linking advertising to childhood obesity before deciding on a final ordinance.

According to the Marketing Matters White Paper, billboards are one of the primary channels by which children are exposed to food marketing.¹ Billboards often promote unhealthy foods and beverages and contribute to community environments that normalize many of these products. Additionally, numerous studies of large cities, including Los Angeles, have shown that residents living in areas with a large percentage of outdoor advertisements promoting food or non-alcoholic beverages were also more prone to being obese.² Even more troubling is that land surveys have shown a significant clustering of unhealthy outdoor advertisements (i.e., billboards) – alcohol, fast food, and soft drinks – around child-serving institutions in low-income and ethnic minority communities in Los Angeles.^{3,4} Simply by walking to school children can be

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exposed daily to multiple outdoor advertisements for unhealthy products. When children as young as two years of age can recognize brand names and associate brands with specific products, it is critical that the City of Los Angeles implement land use regulations that protect children from exposure to unhealthy commercial messages.

Given the alarming obesity statistics as well as the negative influence of unhealthy billboard advertising on children, First 5 LA encourages the City of Los Angeles to move forward with a citywide sign ordinance that:

- Includes a strong billboard takedown ratio, like that of ordinance Version B+, which will lead to fewer billboards overall and therefore has the potential to reduce children's exposure to negative billboard content.
- Prioritizes the takedown of billboards, regardless of content, near areas where children live, learn, and play, such as preschools, schools, parks, libraries and recreation centers.
- Ensures the takedown ratio benefits all communities in the City of Los Angeles, especially in those communities where there are disproportionate amounts of outdoor advertising.
- Considers a voluntary or permanent buffer radius (1,000 feet) near child-frequented locations where new billboards can't be built. The City of Philadelphia prohibits billboards within 660 feet of any park, playground, recreation center, and schools.
- Encourages the City to work with owners of billboards located near child-frequented locations to encourage them to voluntarily limit advertisements for unhealthy foods and beverages in those locations.

Policies addressing food marketing are an important part of stemming the tide of childhood obesity, and protecting our youngest Angelenos. Through our investment in the Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Initiative, parent groups across the County are working hard to address food and beverage marketing in multiple settings, including schools, restaurants, grocery stores and outdoor advertising. The City of Los Angeles has a timely and unique opportunity to address the ubiquity of marketing in our community. First 5 LA encourages the City of Los Angeles's PLUM Committee to adopt an ordinance that takes into consideration the health and well-being of children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kim Belshé
Executive Director
First 5 LA

KB:tc

cc: Roberto Mejia, Chief Legislative Analyst Office
Tom Rothmann, Planning Department

¹ Adler, S., Marketing Matters: A White Paper on Strategies to Reduce Unhealthy Food and Beverage Marketing to Young Children. ChangeLab Solutions, 2015. <http://www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/marketing-matters>

² Lesser et al.: Outdoor advertising, obesity, and soda consumption: a cross sectional study. BMC Public Health 2013 13:20

³ Lowery, BC & Sloane D, The Prevalence of Harmful Content on Outdoor Advertising in Los Angeles: Land Use, Community Characteristics, and the Spatial Inequality of a Public Health Nuisance. American Journal of Public Health. 2014: online version

⁴ Hiller, A., et al., Clustering of unhealthy outdoor advertisements around child-serving institutions: A comparison of three cities. Health 7 Place (2009), doi: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2009.02.014