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FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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Testimony for the Cook County Finance Committee
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Past President, Illinois Academy of Family Physicians
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I'm Dr. Javette Orgain, a family physician in Chicago. I'm here today representing the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians, with over 4,700 members statewide and over 1,110 members in Cook County. I was born and raised here and have dedicated my life and career to providing health care to the underserved people on the South and West sides of Chicago. I have seen the toll that chronic illnesses take on our residents across the life spectrum. While medicine continues to advance with breakthrough treatments and medicines, we are still losing the war against obesity.

Our kids are gaining weight, their parents and grandparents are overweight and obese. Poor nutrition choices, combined with a lack of physical activity, take a heavy toll on the health of our communities. Too much sugar can lead to tooth decay and oral diseases and infections. Obesity is linked to a host of medical problems, including heart disease and diabetes. Over a quarter of Cook County residents are estimated to be obese and nearly 40 percent of African-Americans in the county are obese. Cook County Health and Hospital Systems currently spends \$200 million a year treating obesity-related illnesses. That cost will only grow along with our waistlines if we don't take action.

Sodas and sugary beverages can account for half the sugar in the American diet. It's the number one culprit and also the easiest thing to remove from the equation, if we take bold measures like the proposed tax on sugar sweetened beverages.

The American Academy of Family Physicians, representing over 124,000 family physicians, residents and medical students, supports taxation of sugar sweetened beverages for the purpose of reducing over-consumption as a method of both improving the health of the public and combating the obesity epidemic. AAFP goes on to specify that tax monies should be directed towards programs that improve the health of the public.

The tax alone will not solve the obesity problem. unless we invest that tax revenue in solutions for our communities. Therefore, I ask that you invest 5% of the revenue from the tax in proven community prevention initiatives in schools and health clinics in the neighborhoods that are most at risk.

Nearly 1 in 12 Illinoisans have been diagnosed with diabetes and approximately half of Hispanic children born after 2000 are predicted to be diagnosed with diabetes at some point. Diabetes is twice as common among Mexican-Americans and Puerto Rican Americans than among Caucasian Americans. We know WHO needs our help. Let's use a proven and acceptable strategy to invest in the health of Cook County residents.

Economists predict that a penny-per-ounce excise tax on all sweetened beverages in Illinois would reduce consumption of those drinks by 16%. This can be the kick start we need to get beyond talking about the obesity problem, and make visible and measurable improvements in our county's health.

The family physicians of Illinois ask that you please vote yes for the sugar-sweetened beverage tax proposed by President Toni Preckwinkle. Thank you.