



House Bill 661

Health - Food Service Facilities - Beverage Options With Children's Meals

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**
WITH AMENDMENTS

To: Economic Matters Committee

Date: February 16, 2022

From: Dominic J. Butchko

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 661 **WITH AMENDMENTS**. The bill requires a “healthy” default option for beverages served with children’s meals at restaurants and food service facilities.

Ensuring, and promoting, healthy beverage options represents a policy tool to promote better health choices for and by our children. HB 661 responds to a growing health crisis amongst our youth, in part arising from poor nutrition options and choices. An August 2021 Journal of the American Medical Association study found that obesity among children increased significantly during the pandemic. Further, individuals with underlying health conditions, such as obesity, are at increased risk of difficult complications from each variant of COVID-19.

HB 661 would, however, preempt local laws in this field. Instead of merely setting a floor, this bill would set a universal standard, eliminating counties’ ability to target local concerns or otherwise seek additional information or transparency from their local consumers. The bill as introduced could nullify existing local laws and would quell any ability to consider needed steps in the future in response to health trends, marketing changes, or the like.

Counties do not take issue with the standards set forth in HB 661, but seek to retain the authority to complement the state law with any needed local measures, as available under current law. Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to issue a report of **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS** for HB 661.