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April 1, 2015

The Honorable Anthony Rendon  
State Capitol, Room 5136  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 496 - Support**

Dear Assembly Member Rendon:

California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) supports AB 496, which would improve school districts' ability to comply with the requirement to provide access to free, fresh drinking water during meal times. AB 496 authorizes the California Department of Education (CDE) to receive and allocate funds transferred from state and federal sources to eligible school districts for safe drinking water programs.

CFPA is a statewide policy and advocacy organization whose mission is to improve the health and well being of low-income Californians by increasing their access to nutritious, affordable food. This includes access to more healthful beverages, specifically water. Increasing water consumption is a simple and effective obesity prevention strategy, which is why CFPA has and continues to support policy solutions that will improve access to and consumption of water among students.

In 2010, California enacted SB 1413, which requires schools to provide students with access to free, fresh drinking water during meal times in school food service areas. CFPA supported SB 1413 and has played a key role in helping schools implement the law as well as researching and developing additional policy recommendations that will improve student access to and consumption of water. Concerns about water safety and quality are, unfortunately, one of the top five challenges that schools face in implementing SB 1413.<sup>1</sup>

Because children spend most of their day on campus, access to free, clean drinking water in schools is critically important. Research suggests that substituting water for sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) could help reduce the number of calories – up to 235 fewer calories – that children and adolescents consume per day.<sup>2</sup> In addition to water's role in maintaining a healthy weight, replacing SSBs with free, tap water, which is often fluoridated, can help prevent tooth

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decay, one of the most common chronic diseases among children. Improved water access also helps our students stay hydrated, focused and ready to learn.<sup>3-4</sup>

Schools share a responsibility to provide clean drinking water to students. Even when water from a local utility is safe to drink, aging school infrastructure can cause contaminants, such as lead, to seep into a school's water supply. Many low-income students in rural communities attend schools with limited or no access to safe drinking water. It is important that the state prioritize resources to help improve water infrastructure in schools. Doing so we help ensure all of California's 6.3 million students have access to safe drinking water while on campus.

By allowing CDE to receive and allocate funds from multiple state and federal sources, AB 496 creates a one-stop shop where school districts can find available funding for safe drinking water programs. The additional funding directly impact schools' ability to provide potable tap water to students and staff.

For these reasons, CFPA supports AB 496 and thanks you for introducing this important legislation

Sincerely,



Hector Gutierrez  
Nutrition Policy Advocate

## References

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3. Ismail AI, Sohn W, Lim S, Willem JM. Predictors of Dental Caries Progression in Primary Teeth. *J Dent Res*. 2009;88(3):270-275.
4. Edmonds CJ, Jeffes B., "Does Having a Drink Help You Think? 6-7 Year Old Children Show Improvements in Cognitive Performance from Baseline to Test After Having a Drink of Water. *Appetite*. 2009;53(3): 469-472.

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