

Critical Deadline Looms for Black Mothers and Girls



By Monifa Bandele, campaign director for MomsRising.org, a national organization with over a million members across the country advocating for the health and economic security of our families.

There is a deadline looming of great concern to Black parents of school-aged children. Last month the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released a proposed rule that would update the nutritional guidelines for snacks sold in schools for the first time in 30 years. The public has until April 9th, to make comments about how strong or weak the final rule should be.

This is huge. School-aged children consume about 50 percent of their calories at school and 40 percent of all students supplement or substitute their lunch meal with snacks sold in vending machines and a la carte lines. For African American

children, girls in particular, the strength of this rule is a matter of life quality and expectancy.

You've heard the stats. Black women and girls are suffering from nutrition related illnesses at a higher rate than any other demographic in America. Heart disease is the number one killer of all women, and black women are more likely to develop heart disease than other groups of women. A shocking 78 percent of Black women are overweight or obese, and 37 percent of us have high blood pressure. Sadly for our girls, African American women develop hypertension much earlier in life than our counterparts.

Why does it start earlier? Here's one factor: according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 25 percent of Black girls ages six to eleven are overweight or obese, making them more susceptible to Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension during their lifetimes, specifically during their childhoods.

This is a national emergency!

Thanks to several public information campaigns – including First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign – people are finally beginning to take notice of the sky-rocketing rate of nutrition-related illnesses occurring among all children and focusing more on physical activity. Schools and communities across the country are also realizing that children, just like adults, need consistent exercise to achieve a healthy life.

However, according to a report released last year by the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine, physical activity alone won't be enough to change the tide for Black girls. They need different approaches to prevent obesity including a reduction in calories.

Our children and families are consuming too much junk-food that is high in calories and void of nutrition. Children by

nature are easily influenced. That is why we don't allow children and teens to purchase alcohol and tobacco. They are not equipped with the same decision-making tools as adults. At the end of the day, children are at the mercy of what is available to them at home and at school. We've got to be vigilant about making sure that there are healthy options in both places!

Access to healthy foods in our schools can make a world of difference in the lives of our children. A study by the research and policy group Bridging the Gap found that overweight or obese fifth graders who lived in states with strong laws restricting the sale of unhealthy snacks and beverages in schools were less likely to remain overweight or obese by the eighth grade than were their peers in states without these laws .

Right now, we all have the chance to make sure that there are healthier snack options for children in schools everywhere. The USDA is currently seeking public input on proposed nutritional standards which will allow schools to offer healthier snack foods for our children and limit junk food served to students.

This is where you as parent and community member come in.

Let's make high nutritional standard the norm everywhere. The proposed USDA rule will be as good as we demand it to be. Our voices are needed because we have the most to lose. There is less than a month left to send comments to the USDA. Go to <http://Moms.ly/USDAnow> or text "NOJUNK" to Rising (747464) today to make your voice heard on this important issue.