

The Honorable Adam Hinds, Chairman
The Honorable Mark Cusack, Chairman
Joint Committee on Revenue
State House Room 34
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Hinds and Chairman Cusack:

Children and families in the Commonwealth continue to suffer from common but preventable chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and tooth decay. Sugary drinks are the single largest source of added sugar in the American diet. **A sugary drink tax can improve the financial health of our Commonwealth and, more importantly, the physical health of our children. Please support and report out favorably Senate Bill 1709 and House Bill 2529, *An Act to Promote Healthy Alternatives to Sugary Drinks*.**

Drinking sugar-filled beverages plays a major role in dental decay. Even with regular brushing and flossing, both diet and regular sodas can break down the enamel of teeth. Tiny bacteria live between and around teeth and, when exposed to the sugar in soft drinks, produce an acid that causes damage to tooth enamel, which eventually leads to decay and cavities. This acid can begin to wreak havoc in as little as 20 minutes. Dental caries (tooth decay) is the most common chronic disease in children: it is about five times as common as asthma and seven times as common as hay fever.¹ According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's *The State of Little Teeth* report, nearly half of children aged 6-11 in the U.S. population are affected by tooth decay, along with more than half of those aged 12-19.² Children living in poverty are twice as likely to suffer tooth decay, and their dental diseases are more than twice as likely to go untreated as their more affluent peers.³

Early prevention can translate into significant cost-savings for restorative and emergency dental care. The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry has reported that more than \$40 billion is spent per year on the treatment of dental caries across the United States. While the nation and the Commonwealth seek ways to reduce the cost of health care, the Medicaid program (nationally) has paid between \$100 million and \$400 million annually to treat early childhood caries.⁴

One of the most cost-effective methods of preventing dental decay is through community water fluoridation. Among the qualifying programs this legislation would fund is a municipal grant program for the fluoridation of public water supplies. Fluoride helps prevent cavities by making the outer surface of teeth more resistant to the acid attacks that cause tooth decay. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found that drinking fluoridated water reduces cavities by about 25% in children and adults.⁵ Because of its contribution to the large decline in cavities in the United States since the 1960s, the CDC named community water fluoridation

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2821841/>

² <http://mouthmonsters.mychildrensteeth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/StateofLittleTeeth.2ndEdition.pdf?dt=636928360326879452>

³ <http://mouthmonsters.mychildrensteeth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/StateofLittleTeeth.2ndEdition.pdf?dt=636928360326879452>

⁴ https://www.aapd.org/assets/1/7/State_of_Little_Teeth_Final.pdf

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/index.html>

one of 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.⁶ More than 100 leading health organizations, including the American Dental Association, Massachusetts Dental Society, American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, American Medical Association, World Health Organization, and American Cancer Society, recognize the public health benefits of community water fluoridation for preventing dental decay.⁷

The Massachusetts Dental Society supports initiatives aimed at improving the oral health of the residents of the Commonwealth. This measure does just that by reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. Thank you for your consideration and for thinking of the oral health and well-being of our children in the Commonwealth as you make decisions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Howard M. Zolot
President
Massachusetts Dental Society

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm4841a1.htm>

⁷ <https://www.ada.org/en/public-programs/advocating-for-the-public/fluoride-and-fluoridation/fluoridation-facts/fluoridation-facts-compedium>