Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Senator Joseph Rafferty, Chair
Representative Michael Brennan, Chair
Cross Building Room 208
Augusta ME 04333

Dear Chairmen Rafferty and Brennan and members of the Committee

The American Heart/Stroke Association supports **LD957, "*An Act Requiring Water Bottle Filling Stations in New and Renovated Public Schools*".** The American Heart Association is the largest voluntary health organization fighting to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. This bill will increase student access to free, clean drinking water throughout the school day by installing water bottle filling stations in public schools under new construction and those undergoing substantial renovations.

Since children spend a large portion of the day in school, proactive policies have the potential to significantly influence water consumption among children. Students can consume much more water during the school day with filling stations vs traditional drinking fountains. On average kids drink 2.4 ounces of water when they drink directly from a water fountain (about the size of a condiment cup). When they have access to water jets with cups and bottles, they can increase their water-taking by as much as triple.[1]

Water plays an important role in maintaining a child's overall health. Drinking water supports children's muscles, joints, and tissues; improves their digestive system; and keeps their growing bodies hydrated.[2] Adequate water intake can positively impact children's cognitive performance, particularly short-term memory. Drinking water can also improve children's visual attention and fine motor skills.[3]

The pandemic over the past two years has shown us that people with existing health conditions and compromised immune systems had poorer health outcomes from severe health complications than healthier people. Drinking water, and substituting water for sugary drinks, can help people - children and adults – maintain a healthier weight.[4] Maintaining a healthy weight can increase overall health and reduce developing high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

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[1] Kenney EL, Gortmaker SL, Carter JE, Howe MC, Reiner JF, Cradock AL. Grab a Cup, Fill it Up! An intervention to promote the convenience of drinking water and increase student water consumption during school lunch. Am J Public Health. 2015; 105:1777-83. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2015.302645.

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Water & Nutrition. Updated October 2016. https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/nutrition/index.html. Accessed October 21, 2018.
Jequier E, Constant F, Water as an essential nutrient: the physiological basis of hydration. Eur J Clin Nutr.2010; 62(2):1 15-23, doi 10.1038/ejcn.2009.111.

[3] Masento NA, Golightly M, Field DT, Butler LT, van Reekum CM. Effects of hydration status on cognitive performance and mood. Br J Nutr. 2014; 111(10):1841-52, doi: 10.1017/50007114513004455.
Booth P, Taylor B, Edmonds CJ. Water supplementation improves visual attention and fine motor skills in schoolchildren. Education and Health. 2012; 30:75-79

[4] Zheng M, Allman-Farinelli M, Heitmann BL, Rangan A. Substitution of sugar-sweetened beverages with other beverage alternatives: a review of long-term health outcomes. J Acad Nutr Diet. 2015; 115(5):767-79, doi: 10.1016/j.jand.2015.01.006.

Other important benefits to dispensing water from filling stations is reducing the spread of germs and disease and provide for more appealing drinking water with fewer impurities. For instance, while this bill addresses only newly constructed public schools and schools undergoing substantial renovations, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) approved the expenditure of ESSER funds by school districts to install these units in existing schools. Traditional drinking fountains have been found to be among the germiest item in schools. In some schools, school drinking water quality or poor access to drinking fountains, has caused the districts to purchase individual bottles of water for students – at a greater cost to taxpayers and our environment.

Water bottle filling stations, especially for existing buildings, have filters that can remove lead particles and other impurities from water, a problem many older school buildings have. The cost of a water refill station compared to a water fountain is nominal in the process of construction and can save dollars over time. Because this bill only applies to schools undergoing construction, the expenses for plumbing and drinking water fixtures are already included in overall construction costs approved by residents and local governments. Maine has adopted the International Plumbing Code which requires schools install drinking fountains at a ratio of 1 for every 100 students and permits 50% of those fixtures be substituted with water filling stations. This fits the ratio established in LD957. Personal, reusable, water bottles require fewer refills vs the number of stops one needs to a fountain to remain hydrated all day.

Thank you for your consideration of these facts and the benefits for students' health and academic achievement with water bottle filling stations in newly constructed public schools and schools undergoing substantial renovation. Because traditional drinking fountains are one of the germiest surfaces in schools and water filling stations encourage increased water consumption during the school day, the American Heart Association urges you to support this important policy and vote ought to pass.

Sincerely,
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