

10/31/16 – David Borris' County Board testimony

Good morning – and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the subject of a sweetened beverage tax in Cook County. My name is David Borris, and I own Hel's Kitchen Catering, an off premise catering company with 45 full time and more than 80 part time and seasonal workers in Northbrook.

As a small business owner, I understand the critical relationship between cutting costs and increasing revenues. There are moments for both strategies in difficult economic times, but a one sided approach that only cuts expenses and guts important programs is not the way to grow a successful business, or a healthy economy. Cuts to social services cannot be the singular path to fill a \$174 million hole in the Cook County budget. Generating additional revenue will be critical to ensure a budget that is fair and does not leave Cook County families in crisis or break the bank for small businesses.

One win-win revenue option on the table is the Sweetened Beverage Tax- a penny-per-ounce excise tax on sweetened drinks paid by the distributors of those drinks. This proposal is estimated to raise more than \$74 million annually to invest in community health programs, like nutrition and physical education in schools and public health prevention programs in Cook County's most vulnerable neighborhoods.

Misinformation about this tax is being unfairly and deliberately circulated, claiming that it will be harmful to our economy, but this board should support it as a part of the 2017 budget package based on the facts:

- Claims that "a sweetened drinks tax will cause job losses," are overstated and shortsighted. While net prices of these drinks will rise(as intended), the job loss claims do not account for the increased consumption of *non-sugary* drinks such as milk, water or 100 % juice drinks.
- Overinflated job loss estimates fail to account for the creation of related new jobs in both the private and public sectors. Wellness initiatives could include hiring physical educators in schools or teachers for cooking and nutrition classes in communities. Funding for infrastructure will create new construction jobs, from building multi-use trails for walking and biking, to creating new, safe playgrounds for children to play in.
- Obesity-related diseases cost Illinois over \$6 billion a year in healthcare costs, and continue to fuel a cycle that drives small business health insurance premiums through the roof. As the most populous county in Illinois, Cook County can be a leader in beginning to bend the cost curve that is so critical to bringing those premiums back under control.
At the same time, we can look to experience a healthier workforce, with improved efficiency and less lost work days due to illness, while creating the funding to deliver prevention and health education services to our lowest income and most vulnerable residents.

By shoring up the budget and providing funding for community health and wellness initiatives, the sweetened beverage tax can help prevent health service cuts in the current budget crisis while saving taxpayers and small business' millions of dollars through improved health and reduced healthcare costs. It's a win-win for businesses, employees and residents throughout Cook County.

Sincerely,

David Borris

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National Executive Board Member – Main Street Alliance

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