

Date of Hearing: June 23, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Mia Bonta, Chair
SB 977 (Weber Pierson) – As Amended June 15, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 36-0

SUBJECT: Chain restaurants: children's meals.

SUMMARY: Requires a chain restaurant that sells a children's meal to offer at least one children's meal that meets specified minimum nutrition standards. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Requires a chain restaurant that sells a children's meal to offer at least one children's meal that meets the requirements of this bill.
- 2) Prohibits a children's meal required to be offered by this bill from containing more than any of the following:
 - a) Five hundred fifty calories;
 - b) Seven hundred milligrams of sodium;
 - c) Ten percent of calories from saturated fat;
 - d) Fifteen grams of added sugar; and,
 - e) Zero grams of trans fat.
- 3) Requires a children's meal offered pursuant to this bill to include at least two of the following servings:
 - a) A serving of one-half of a cup or more of fruit. Specifies that 100% fruit juice is considered a serving of fruit;
 - b) A serving of one-half of a cup or more of vegetables;
 - c) A serving of one-half of a cup or more nonfat or low-fat dairy;
 - d) A serving of meat or a meat alternative equal to at least one of the following:
 - i) One ounce of meat, poultry, or seafood;
 - ii) One egg;
 - iii) One-fourth of a cup of soy products or pulses (seeds of legumes), including beans, peas, or lentils;
 - iv) Two tablespoons of nut butter; or,
 - v) One ounce of nuts and seeds.

- e) A serving of eight or more grams of whole grains that meets at least one of the following conditions:
 - i) The serving contains 50% or more of whole grain ingredients; or,
 - ii) The first ingredient in the serving's ingredient list, in descending order of predominance, is whole grains.
- 4) Requires, on or before July 1, 2027, a chain restaurant that sells a children's meal to include information on how to comply with the requirements of this bill during any of the employee's ongoing training program and a new employee's training process.
- 5) Defines the following for purposes of this bill:
 - a) "Chain restaurant" to mean a restaurant or similar retail food establishment that is part of a chain with 20 or more locations doing business under the same name and offering for sale substantially the same menu items, regardless of the type of ownership of the locations;
 - b) "Children's meal" to mean a combination of food items and a beverage, or a single food item and a beverage, sold together at a single price, primarily intended for consumption by a child;
 - c) "Default beverage" to mean the beverage automatically included or offered as part of a children's meal, absent a specific request by the purchaser of the children's meal for an alternative beverage; and,
 - d) "Restaurant" to mean a retail food establishment that prepares, serves, and vends food directly to the consumer.
- 6) Finds and declares that the nutrition standards in this section are informed by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the National Restaurant Association's 2021 Kids LiveWell 2.0 nutrition standards for children's meals.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Retail Food Code (CRFC) to provide for the regulation of retail food facilities. Health and sanitation standards are established at the state level through the CRFC, while enforcement is charged to local agencies, carried out by the 58 county environmental health departments, and four city environmental health departments (Berkeley, Long Beach, Pasadena, and Vernon). [Health and Safety Code (HSC) § 113700, *et seq.*]
- 2) Defines a "food facility" as an operation that stores, prepares, packages, serves, vends, or otherwise provides food for human consumption at the retail level. Excludes various entities from the definition of a "food facility," including a cottage food operation, and a church, private club, or other nonprofit association that gives or sells food to its members and guests, and not to the general public, at an event that occurs no more than three days in any 90-day period. [HSC § 113789]

- 3) Requires a restaurant that sells children's meals to make the default beverage offered with the children's meal one of the following:
 - a) Water, sparkling, or flavored water, with no added natural or artificial sweeteners;
 - b) Unflavored milk; or,
 - c) A nondairy milk alternative that contains no more than 130 calories per container or serving that meets the standards for the National School Lunch Program. [HSC § 114379.20]
- 4) Defines "children's meal," for purposes of the requirement in 3) above, as a combination of food items and a beverage, or a single food item and a beverage sold together at a single price intended primarily for consumption by a child. [HSC § 114379.10]
- 5) Specifies that the requirement in 3) above does not prohibit a restaurant's ability to sell an alternative beverage instead of the default beverage offered with the meal, if requested by the purchaser. [HSC § 114379.30]
- 6) Specifies that a violation of the requirements described in 3) above is an infraction, with a first violation resulting in a notice of violation, a second violation within a five-year period from the initial notice of violation subject to a \$250 fine, and a third or subsequent violation within a five-year period subject to a fine of up to \$500. [HSC § 114379.50]
- 7) Requires a food facility, defined in federal law as a chain restaurant with 20 or more locations, to comply with federal menu labeling requirements that provide calorie and other nutritional information. Provides for local enforcement of the menu labeling requirement, and provides for a fine of between \$50 and \$500 for a first violation, between \$100 and \$1,000 for a second violation in a five-year period, and a fine of between \$250 and \$2,500 for subsequent violations. [HSC § 114094]
- 8) Requires chain restaurants with 20 or more locations operating under the same business name with substantially the same menu, and "other similar" eating establishments, to provide nutrition information related to standard menu items. [Title 21, United States Code § 343(q)(5)(H)]

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **PURPOSE OF THIS BILL.** The author states that she is deeply committed to ensuring that all children in California have access to healthy meals that support their growth and development. The author notes that as a physician, she has seen the alarming impact of poor nutrition on children's health, and as a mother, she knows how challenging it can be to find healthy options when dining out. The author asserts that currently, California faces a childhood obesity crisis, and the state must take action now to reverse these trends. The author states that this bill is an important step forward. The author continues that this bill will require chain restaurants to offer healthier meal options for children, helping families make better food choices when dining out. The author also states that by setting clear nutritional

standards and providing training for restaurant employees, this bill makes it easier for parents to provide healthy meals for their kids, no matter where they eat. The author concludes that this bill will help ensure that children's meals not only meet basic nutritional standards but also support their long-term health and that it is time to prioritize our children's well-being and take steps toward a healthier California for all.

2) BACKGROUND.

- a) **Childhood obesity.** Childhood obesity is a challenging public health concern. According to a 2023 continuing education activity published in the *National Library of Medicine* titled "Obesity Effects on Child Health," the prevalence of childhood obesity has alarmingly increased. The overall burden of obesity has almost tripled since 1975 and an eightfold increase in obesity burden in the 5 to 19 years age group has been noted between 1975 and 2016. According to the State Department of Public Health's Nutrition and Food Branch, between 2021 and 2022, 14.8% of children ages 2 to 11 were overweight for their age, and 37.1% adolescents ages 12 to 17 were overweight or obese. A 2025 study titled "Prevalence of Extremely Severe Obesity and Metabolic Dysfunction Among US Children and Adolescents," published in *JAMA Network Open* found that the numbers of youth in the two highest body mass index classifications increased 2.5 times between 2008 and 2023.

Obesity can lead to severe health conditions, including non-insulin-dependent diabetes, cardiovascular problems, bronchial asthma, obstructive sleep apnea, hypertension, hepatic steatosis, gastroesophageal reflux, and psychosocial issues.

- b) **Taste preferences are shaped at a young age.** According to Healthy Eating Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, preferences for food are learned and acquired through experiences shaped by caregiving. Establishing healthy eating behaviors early in life is an important health promotion goal with long-lasting impacts. Childhood is a critical period for the development of eating behaviors and habits that last into adulthood and play a vital role in growth, development, overall health, and the prevention of obesity and other lifelong, diet-related chronic diseases.
- c) **Legislative landscape on menu labeling and children's meals.** SB 1420 (Padilla), Chapter 600, Statutes of 2008 requires every food facility that is part of a chain of at least 20 food facilities with the same name that sell substantially the same menu items, to disclose to consumers specified nutritional information, including the calorie content, for all standard menu items. Subsequently, as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (ACA), the federal government enacted a similar requirement. Following the enactment of the ACA, the state menu labeling law was repealed (contingent on enactment of the federal implementing regulations) in order to have California conform to the similar federal requirements. Under the federal regulations, chain restaurants must disclose the number of calories contained in standard items on menus and menu boards. For self-service foods and foods on display, the calories must be listed in close proximity and clearly associated with the standard menu item. The restaurants must also provide, upon request, the following written information for standard menu items: total calories; total fat; saturated fat; trans fat; cholesterol; sodium; total carbohydrates; sugars; fiber; and, protein. In addition, two statements must be displayed on all forms of the menu or menu board, one indicating this written information

is available upon request, and the other about daily calorie intake, indicating that 2,000 calories a day is used for general nutrition advice, but calorie needs may vary.

SB 1192 (Monning), Chapter 608, Statutes of 2018 requires restaurants that sell children's meals to make either water, milk, or a nondairy milk alternative the default beverage that is offered with the children's meal. This bill builds upon SB 1192 by requiring chain restaurants to offer a meal that meets specified nutrition requirements, which are based off Kids Live Well 2.0 standards.

d) Kids Live Well 2.0 Standards. According to its website, the National Restaurant Association launched Kids LiveWell (KLW) in 2011 to help parents and children select healthier menu options when dining out. Restaurants that participate in this voluntary program commit to offering healthful meal items for children with a particular focus on increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and low-fat dairy while limiting unhealthy fats, sugars, and sodium. The National Restaurant Association "relaunched" this effort in 2021, which they refer to as KLW 2.0, to better align with the current nutrition science. Restaurants participating in KLW agree to offer at least two children's meals (compared to just one under this bill) that meet the specified criteria. The limits on calories, calories from saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium, as well as the exclusion of trans fat, are the same in both this bill and KLW. Likewise, both KLW and this bill require the meals to include servings from at least two of five specified food groups, and that at least one of the servings must be a fruit or vegetable. KLW explicitly states that 100% fruit juice meets the requirements for a 1/2-cup serving of fruit. As such, this bill specifies that 100% fruit juice is considered a fruit.

3) SUPPORT. The American Heart Association (AHA) and the American Diabetes Association (ADA) are co-sponsors of this bill and state in support, this bill takes an important step toward improving the dietary environment for California's children and protecting them from early risk factors tied to type 2 diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease. AHA and ADA continue that restaurants are a frequent source of food for American families, with families dining out at an average of four to five times each week. AHA and ADA continue that when children dine out, they tend to consume more calories, more sugars, more sugary drinks, and higher levels of saturated fat and sodium than they would at home. AHA and ADA state that excess consumption contributes to increased risk for high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic diseases later in life. AHA and ADA argue that this bill directly helps address these concerns by ensuring parents and guardians have at least one clearly identifiable, healthier children's meal that aligns with recommended dietary guidelines. AHA and ADA note that parents understand their kids' needs and how to determine appropriate meals, but even the most informed parent cannot choose a healthier option if none exists in the environment where they are dining. AHA and ADA conclude that this bill helps remove this barrier by ensuring that healthier options are available in the first place, preserving complete parental choice while expanding the range of options available to families in communities where nutritious choices are often limited.

4) RELATED LEGISLATION. SB 869 (Weber Pierson) would require chain restaurants offering a standard menu beverage item with high added sugar content to display on its menus an added sugar icon immediately adjacent to those menu beverage items, and to include a factual warning statement explaining the added sugar icon, as specified. SB 869 is pending a hearing in the Assembly Health Committee.

5) PREVIOUS LEGISLATION.

- a) SB 764 (Weber Pierson) of 2025 was substantially similar to this bill and would have required chain restaurants to offer at least one's children's meal that meets minimum nutrition standards. Would have required the chain restaurant to include an icon or symbol on the menu to identify that meal. Would have required a chain restaurant to include information on how to comply with SB 764 during an employee's ongoing training program and a new employee's training process. SB 764 was vetoed by Governor Newsom, who stated in part:

"This bill regulates restaurants in a way that is unnecessary and overly burdensome. Parents understand their children's needs and how to determine appropriate meals for them when eating at restaurants."

- b) SB 68 (Menjivar), Chapter 741, Statutes of 2025 requires a food facility that is subject to the federal disclosure provisions for nutrient content information to provide written notification of major food allergens contained as an ingredient in each menu item.
- c) SB 1192 (Monning), Chapter 608, Statutes of 2018 requires restaurants that sell children's meals to make either water, unflavored milk, or a nondairy milk alternative the default beverage that is offered with the meal.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

American Diabetes Association (co-sponsor)
American Heart Association (co-sponsor)
California Medical Association (CMA)
California State Alliance of YMCAs
Cleaneearth4kids.org
The Office of Kat Taylor

Opposition

None on file

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