

PTA Joins Child Advocates to Stop Commercialism and Support Nutrition Standards in Schools

by Ellie Goldberg, VPLegislation@masspta.org

PTA was in good company on May 30 in Hearing Room A-1 as Ellie Goldberg, Massachusetts PTA VP of Legislation and Mary Ann Stewart, Massachusetts PTA board member, testified at the Joint Committee on Public Health public hearing in support of HB 489, "An Act Relative to the Public Health Impact of Commercialism in Schools."

Organized by the *Campaign for Commercial Free Childhood*, the day consisted of several panels addressing the many issues covered by this topic. The first panel to testify included experts Susan Linn, Juliet Schor, and Diane Levin. The second panel included Ellie Goldberg, speaking on behalf of Massachusetts PTA, Lin Vickery, a parent from Lunenburg describing problems caused by Channel One in her child's school, and Dr. Alan Meyers, Associate Professor of Medicine at Boston University School of Medicine, co-chair of the Obesity Committee of the Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics and staff pediatrician for the Nutrition and Fitness for Life program at Boston Medical Center.

MaryAnn Stewart testified as a parent of three school-age children and an engaged citizen. Earlier in the morning, Ellie also attended a rally organized by the Massachusetts Public Health Association on the steps outside the State House to publicize the need to set nutrition standards in schools.

The press conference included Harold D. Cox (until recently Cambridge's chief public health officer and now Associate Dean for public health at the Boston University School of Public Health), John Auerbach (Department of Public Health Commissioner), and Representative Peter Koutoujian (Public Health Committee co-chair and chief bill sponsor) and other public health, nutrition and school health experts making the link between soaring rates of childhood obesity, diabetes, and other junk food related diseases and disorders, especially in children.

Other bills related to school health and child and adolescent health on the May 30 Joint Committee on Public Health School Health, Child & Adolescent Health agenda included:

- H489, "An Act relative to the public health impact of commercialism in schools." – Representative Peter Koutoujian
- H1172, "An Act relative to health education." – Representative Ruth Balser
- H2005, "An Act relative to the creation of a sports injury commission."- Representative Cory Atkins
- H2095, "An Act to improve access to nutritious foods and physical activity."- Representative Linda Dorcena Forry
- H2107, "An Act establishing a health education program in the public schools."- Representative Mary Grant
- H2168, "An Act to promote proper school nutrition."- Representative Peter Koutoujian
- H2216, "An Act relative to the creation of a sports injury commission."- Representative Douglas Peterson
- S1220, "An Act relative to the creation of a sports injury commission." – Senator Cynthia Stone Creem
- S1262, "An Act promoting healthy alternatives in public school food programs." – Senator Richard Moore

Panel 1 Experts. Bios and Credentials:

Susan Linn is an instructor in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and Associate Director of the Media Center at Judge Baker Children's Center. She is also co-founder of the Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood coalition. In her book, *Consuming Kids*, she takes a comprehensive and unsparing look at the demographic advertisers call "the kid market," taking readers on a compelling and disconcerting journey

through modern childhood as envisioned by commercial interests. *Consuming Kids* reveals the magnitude of this problem and shows what can be done about it.

Juliet Schor's research over the last ten years has focused on issues pertaining to trends in work and leisure, consumerism, the relationship between work and family, women's issues and economic justice. Schor's latest book is *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (Scribner 2004). *Born to Buy* is both an account of marketing to children from inside the agencies and firms and an assessment of how these activities are affecting children. Schor is chair of the Department of Sociology at Boston College, a board member and co-founder of the Center for a New American Dream, an organization devoted to transforming North American lifestyles to make them more ecologically and socially sustainable. Before joining Boston College, she taught at Harvard University for 17 years, in the Department of Economics and the Committee on Degrees in Women's Studies. She also teaches periodically at Schumacher College, an International Center for Ecological Studies based in south-west England.

Diane Levin is Professor of Education at Wheelock College in Boston where she has been involved in training early childhood professionals for over twenty-five years. Currently she teaches courses on play, media and violence prevention. She has a B.S. in Child Development from Cornell University, an M.S.Ed. in Special Education from Wheelock College, and an interdisciplinary Ph.D. from Tufts University in Sociology of Education and Child Development. An internationally recognized expert, Levin helps professionals and parents understand and counteract the harmful effects of violence, media and commercial culture on children. Levin is a co-founder of *Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment* (TRUCE: www.truceteachers.org), which prepares materials to help parents deal with the media and commercial culture in their children's lives. She is also a co-founder of the *Coalition for a Commercial-Free Childhood* (www.commercialfreechildhood.org), which works to educate the public about and end the commercial exploitation of children. She is a Research Associate at Lesley University's Center for Peaceable Schools