

Sodas Fizz Out

Nutrition advocates are celebrating new wins in the fight against soft drinks in schools.

Connecticut lawmakers, following California's example, passed a bill in April prohibiting the sale of sodas and sports drinks at public schools. The passage of this law made its way through the Connecticut legislature despite pressure from the beverage industry to oppose the bill. Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal charged Coca-Cola Bottling Company with offering financial incentives for the sale of its "junk soda" drinks by providing schools with a sales commission at least 25% higher for the sale of sodas than for Coca-Cola's healthier drink options. Other charges against the Connecticut-based soft drink company include encouraging Teamsters officials to warn legislators of potential job losses and threatening to sever contributions to schools, such as sports equipment and scholarships.

On a national level, the **William J. Clinton Foundation** announced on May 3rd that the nation's largest beverage distributors have agreed to halt nearly all sales of sodas to public schools. This is good news for advocates who have targeted soda as a significant contributor to the epidemic of poor nutrition and physical inactivity.

"When we first suggested getting schools out of the soda and junk food business, people told us the children would not drink anything else. They were wrong," notes Harold Goldstein, Executive Director of **California Center for Public Health Advocacy**. The Center was one of the main organizers behind the successful passage of California's SB 965 which eliminates the sale of sodas in all California Schools. "This unprecedented decline in soda profits shows that our work is clearly having an impact," Goldstein said.

"After California led the nation by passing the toughest nutrition legislation in the country, it was only a matter of time for the rest of the nation to take action in protecting children's health. I am encouraged that the soda companies have realized that they share responsibility in providing healthier beverages to children," says SB 965 author, Senator Martha Escutia.

The battle to improve the food and beverage environment is far from over. But advocates are celebrating the fact that the beverage industry is feeling the pressure.