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April 3, 2024

Senate Committee on Insurance
Louisiana State Legislature

RE: Senate Bill 106 regarding Coverage of Obesity Treatment

Dear Chair Talbot and Vice-Chair Bass and Members of the Senate Committee on Insurance,

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) appreciates the opportunity to express our strong support for policy proposals that improve coverage for evidence-based obesity care, such as intensive behavioral therapy, FDA-approved obesity medications, and metabolic and bariatric surgery. For these reasons, we are pleased to support Senate Bill (SB) 106 – legislation introduced by Senators Barrow and Edmonds that would require health plans to cover treatment, such as bariatric surgery, for those affected by severe obesity.

Louisiana currently has the second highest obesity rate in the country with more than 40% of the population living with the disease and another 31% with overweight. Altogether, that's more than 71% of people living in Louisiana who experience overweight or obesity.¹ Legislation such as SB 106 is an important first step toward ensuring that all Louisianans have access to all evidence-based obesity treatment avenues.

The OAC is the leading national non-profit dedicated to serving people living with obesity through awareness, support, education, and advocacy. Our vision is to create a society where all individuals are treated with respect and without discrimination or bias regardless of their size or weight. We strive for those affected by the disease of obesity to have the right to access safe and effective treatment options. OAC has a strong and growing membership of more than 80,000 individuals across the United States and 2870 members in Louisiana.

Obesity is a complex, multifactorial, common, serious, relapsing, and costly chronic disease that serves as a major risk factor for developing conditions such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, renal disease, non-alcoholic steatohepatitis, and 13 types of cancer (which make up 40 percent of all cancers diagnosed).² A recent report also found that if we can treat obesity, we can reduce diabetes (-8.9%), hypertension (2.3%), heart disease (-2.6%), cancer (-1.3%), and disability (-4.7%) over 10 years in private insurance coverage and Medicare.³

¹ Trust for America's Health 2023 State of Obesity Report

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/obesity/index>. Accessed April 26, 2023

³ Benefits of Medicare Coverage for Weight Loss Drugs. By Alison Sexton Ward, PhD, Bryan Tysinger, PhD, PhuongGiang Nguyen, Dana Goldman, PhD and Darius Lakdawalla, PhD. USC Schaeffer, 2023.

Obesity is driven by strong biology, not by choice and is often the root cause and driver of other health complications. And as such, this disease requires treatment and management just like diabetes, cancer, or high blood pressure. For these reasons, we urge you and your colleagues on the Insurance Committee to support passage of SB 106 as part of the legislature's ongoing efforts to secure coverage of comprehensive obesity care for all Louisianans.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel to contact me or OAC Policy Consultant Chris Gallagher via email at chris@potomaccurrents.com. Thank you.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Nadglowski, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Joseph Nadglowski, Jr.
OAC President and CEO