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**Written Testimony to the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Submitted by Joseph Nadglowski, Jr. President and CEO of the Obesity Action Coalition**

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), a national non-profit organization dedicated to helping those affected by obesity, respectfully submits the following written testimony to the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development in support of H.1850 on behalf of our more than 12,000 members throughout the United States who are personally affected by all forms of obesity.

The OAC enthusiastically supports H. 1850 An Act Making Discrimination on the Basis of Weight and Height Unlawful and thank Representative Rushing and Representative Canavan for introducing it. We encourage Massachusetts to take a proactive step in the right direction and join the forward-thinking state of Michigan and a number of cities and counties through the United States in recognition of the fact that weight discrimination is a significant and growing problem. A problem that is not only diminishing the quality of life and quality of health of its victims, but also is a major barrier in this country's ability to address the obesity epidemic.

Weight discrimination's wide spread prevalence is evident in a number of settings including the workplace, education and healthcare.

Workplace

In the workplace, studies suggest that weight discrimination is evident in hiring, firing, wage and promotion practices. Obese workers are less likely to be hired despite equal or better skills, more likely to be fired and more likely to be passed over for promotion. Even when hired, obese workers, especially women, earn significantly less than their normal weight counterparts and both obese men and women are more likely to have low paying jobs (non-managerial, non-professional).

Education

The National Education Association likely said it best when they stated that "For fat students, the school experience is one of ongoing prejudice, unnoticed discrimination and almost constant harassment." Such harassment and discrimination is not only from student's peers, but also from their teachers who often perceive their obese students as untidy, more emotional, less likely to succeed and more likely to have family problems. Studies have proven that obese children are less likely to be accepted to college despite equivalent application rates and achievement and sometimes are even dismissed from college because of their weight.

Healthcare

Unfortunately, in a population that likely needs close healthcare monitoring, discrimination and stigma also exist in the healthcare system. Because of attitudes of healthcare providers and a lack of appropriately sized equipment, a number of studies have indicated that obese individuals are reluctant to seek medical care, are more likely to delay preventative healthcare and cancel more medical appointments.

Taken together, the consequences of being discriminated at work, school and the doctor are significant and can have serious and negative impact on both one's quality of life, but also their quality of health.



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Weight Discrimination as a Barrier to Reducing the Obesity Epidemic

Too often, the perpetrators of weight discrimination and bias argue that they engage in such behavior as a mechanism to encourage people to lose weight and become healthier. The reality is that studies from the Yale Rudd Center on Food Policy and Obesity show the opposite to be true. Individuals who are victims of weight discrimination are more likely to engage in poor eating behaviors and stop diet and exercise programs immediately after being victimized. This, of course, worsens the individual's already-difficult battle with obesity and worsens the overall impact of obesity on the health of society. They next argue that obesity is a condition of personal choice and therefore should not be protected. This viewpoint also ignores almost everything scientists have proven about the obesity epidemic including the numerous genetic and environmental contributors. The obesity epidemic, from both a personal and societal viewpoint, is not that simple and ignoring the other complex factors contributing to it by calling it a personal choice is a major barrier to solving the problem. No one chooses to be affected by obesity, discriminated against at work, at school or in everyday life.

The final argument against such anti-discrimination laws is that they are not necessary, but the harsh reality is that recent studies show that weight discrimination is now more prevalent than race discrimination. Much like those targeted by race discrimination, those affected by obesity wear their stigma target on their body. The simple thought of a law such as this not being necessary truly speaks volumes to the much-needed educating of our society on obesity stigma and weight bias.

In an ideal world, laws like H.1850 would be unneeded, but because of the environment we live in today, as detailed above, we strongly urge the Massachusetts legislature to step up and aid the residents of your state being victimized by weight discrimination by adopting H.1850. Discrimination in any form is wrong, please do your part to make sure it is less prevalent in the state of Massachusetts.