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03/13/2024

State of Alabama
House of Representatives
11 South Union St
Montgomery, AL 36130

Re: Support for Alabama House Bill (HB) 18 - Nick Arjomand No Weight Discrimination Act

Dear Representative Givan,

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) appreciates the opportunity to comment in support of Alabama HB 18 - Nick Arjomand No Weight Discrimination Act, a bill that would make it unlawful for a person to deny an individual public accommodation based upon the individual's weight or body size and makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against an applicant or employee based upon weight or body size.

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 2,475 members in Alabama.

Obesity is driven by powerful underlying biology, not by choice. Obesity is not a personal failure or the sole result of lack of willpower. Obesity is a growing chronic disease in Alabama with more than 38% of the population living with the disease and another 34% with overweight. Altogether, that's more than 72% of people living in Alabama who experience overweight or obesity.

Weight bias is holding negative attitudes about people's weight or harming and shaming them because of their weight. Weight bias can exist in every aspect of life including employment, health care, education, media and someone's personal life. It remains a socially acceptable form of discrimination in American society and is rarely challenged. Discrimination can affect self-esteem and opportunities.

Negative perceptions of people affected by obesity exist in employment settings where employees affected by obesity are viewed as less competent, lazy and lacking in self-discipline by their co-workers and employers. These attitudes can have a negative impact on wages, promotions and decisions about employment status for employees affected by obesity. The consequences of being denied a job or rejected in social or public settings can have a serious and negative impact on quality of life.

Individuals affected by obesity face both direct discrimination and more subtle forms of bias. We need to help individuals understand what weight bias is and why this type of discrimination is unacceptable. For these

The mission of the Obesity Action Coalition is to elevate and empower those affected by obesity through education, advocacy and support.

reasons, we support HB 18 and appreciate the focus that Alabama policymakers are placing on finding solutions to address the obesity epidemic in the state. These efforts will hopefully ensure that all constituents are protected from weight-based discrimination.

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.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joseph Nadglowski, Jr.
OAC President and CEO