March 2, 2026

Chairman Joe Statler
Committee on Education
West Virginia House of Delegates
Room 434M, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305

Chairman Vernon Criss
Committee on Finance
West Virginia House of Delegates
Room 462M, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305

Vice Chairman Christopher W. Toney
Committee on Education
West Virginia House of Delegates
Room 434M-A, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305

Vice Chairman Clay Riley
Committee on Finance
West Virginia House of Delegates
Room 472M, Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305

Dear Chairman Statler, Chairman Criss, Vice Chairman Toney and Vice Chairman Riley,

On behalf of the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA) and the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), we are writing to respectfully request that milk, yogurt, and cheese be explicitly exempted from the added sugar limits proposed in SB 745. While we strongly support the goal of improving student health, this legislation, as currently drafted, would effectively ban wholesome dairy products that serve as the foundation of our school meal programs, harming the health and nutrition of West Virginia's students as well as the state's local dairy processing businesses and dairy farmers.

The Nutritional Value of Dairy Served in Schools

For many students, school breakfast and lunch are the only reliable sources of nutrition they receive. Studies consistently demonstrate that school meals are the healthiest meals children eat all day. Dairy products like milk, yogurt, and cheese provide 13 essential nutrients, including protein, calcium, potassium, and vitamin D, which are often absent from other single food items on a student's tray. Currently, flavored milk accounts for approximately 4% of total added sugars in children's diets while delivering key

nutrients that are often underconsumed among young Americans, including protein, calcium, potassium, vitamin D, vitamin A, and vitamin B12.

An estimated 67.3% to 93.9% of school-aged children still fail to consume enough dairy products to meet the number of servings recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Research indicates that children who drink flavored milk consume more milk overall and achieve higher intake of important nutrients, with no difference in body mass index or body weight.

Industry Proactivity and the Unintended Consequences of SB 745

Dairy processors have a long record of continuous nutritional improvement. Since 2006, processors have proactively reduced added sugars in flavored milk sold to schools by 60% and lowered calories by nearly 25%, while also removing all certified artificial colors. In West Virginia, chocolate milk currently averages 10 grams of added sugar, which exceeds the bill's requirement capping added sugars at no more than 5% of calories by 2029.

Removing these nutrient-dense options leads to predictable, negative outcomes. Eliminating flavored milk has been shown to cause a 37% reduction in milk sales to schools, as many students simply stop consuming milk entirely when flavored options are removed. If SB 745 passes in its current form, an estimated 10 million fewer half-pint servings of milk would be served in West Virginia schools, creating negative health consequences for students missing milk's essential nutrients. Not only does the removal of flavored milk lead to a decrease in milk consumption but it also has been shown to lead to decreased average daily participation in school meal programs. Therefore, these restrictions on added sugars could lead to lower student participation in school meal programs and put schools at risk of losing vital federal reimbursements that are tied directly to participation rates and negatively impact overall nutrition and food security.

Economic Impact on West Virginia

A "one-size-fits-all" approach that removes a key source of nutrition creates significant hardship for West Virginia's dairy farmers and processors. Banning these products hurts the livelihoods of neighbors working across the state and region's dairy supply chain. The West Virginia dairy industry generates over $597 million in total economic impact and is responsible for 9,700 direct and indirect jobs. West Virginia is home to 32 dairy

farm families who provide important rural jobs and contribute significantly to the tax base in rural counties. A reduction in flavored milk demand in schools would cost West Virginia farmers approximately $3.4 million annually in lost income. This decrease in demand leads to job losses in cities and towns like Charleston, Fairmont, and Beckley, where dairy production occurs and dairy processing and distribution facilities operate.

Maintaining access to low-fat flavored milk and nutrient-dense dairy is vital for the growth, development, and immune function of West Virginia's children. We respectfully request that you prevent these unintended nutritional and economic consequences by exempting milk, cheese, and yogurt from the added sugar limits in SB 745.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to our students.

Sincerely,





Michael Dykes, D.V.M.
President and CEO
International Dairy Foods Association
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Gregg Doud
President and CEO
National Milk Producers Federation
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