

GOVERNOR'S PRESS OFFICE

CONTACT: David Farmer, 287-2531
(cell) 557-5968
Dan Cashman, 287-2531
(cell) 837-4821

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Governor Ceremonially Signs Legislation to Combat Obesity

AUGUSTA – Surrounded by Legislators and public health advocates, Governor John E. Baldacci today ceremonially signed three bills designed to combat the problem of obesity in Maine.

"This is a critical public health issue, especially when it comes to our children's health," said the Governor. "Maine has the highest rate of obesity in New England. It's estimated that 30 percent of our youth are overweight or obese."

"We know that obesity and overweight are key contributors to serious medical conditions, generating high costs to our health care system," said the Governor. "These bills will help us to continue to address reduce obesity, and thus the preventable diseases associated with it."

The Governor ceremonially signed the following health care bills:

LD 1259, An Act to Increase Access to Nutrition Information, sponsored by House Speaker Hannah Pingree (D-North Haven). The bill requires chain restaurants to provide caloric content of menu items to customers. The provisions go into effect on Feb. 1, 2011.

LD 1407, An Act to Assess the Physical Education Capacity of Elementary Schools in Maine and To Establish the Obesity and Chronic Disease Fund within the Department of Education, sponsored by House Majority Whip, Representative Seth Berry (D-Bowdoinham). The bill moves Maine further in the direction of increasing physical education and physical activity in schools.

LD 319, An Act To Track the Prevalence of Childhood Obesity in Maine, sponsored by Representative Rankin (D-Hiram). The legislation calls for the voluntary collection by schools of body mass index. Accurate, confidential screening will provide data to measure the problem of obesity and the level of success of efforts to combat obesity.

"We've been working on the underlying issues impacting obesity for many years," said Governor Baldacci. "Through Dirigo Health Reform we have been working to increase

preventive care, encourage best practices and engage all stakeholders in the public health system. The State Health Plan is our roadmap for making Maine the healthiest state in the nation. In addition, this year we passed the Universal Wellness initiative, which provides community-based support and services to help people be healthy.”

For more information on these or other bills from this session, visit <http://janus.state.me.us/legis/>

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