

## **State Representative Kim Norton**

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For Immediate Release

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### **NEWS RELEASE STATE LAWMAKERS DISCUSS CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN MINNESOTA**

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ST. PAUL, MN – State lawmakers heard alarming testimony yesterday at the State Capitol on the growing problem of childhood obesity in Minnesota, and proposed solutions to do something about it.

"Twenty-three percent of Minnesota children ages 10 to 17 are struggling with the difficult health challenges of childhood obesity," said State Rep. Kim Norton (DFL-Rochester), Childhood Obesity Working Group co-chair. "No child should begin life facing a lifetime of serious health problems. There are steps we can take to help our children live healthier, and reduce the number of obese children in Minnesota."

Lawmakers and stakeholders at the hearing discussed obesity-related health challenges facing young people in Minnesota, and proposed public health legislation and education measures to promote healthier lifestyles. Experts warned that children struggling with obesity are at higher risk to develop problems such as heart disease or cancer, and if parents and children aren't encouraged to change their habits, the cost to the healthcare system will continue to rise.

"Preventing obesity is an essential part of reining-in escalating health care costs and one of the best places to begin is with our children," said State Rep. Paul Thissen (DFL-Minneapolis), House Health Care Policy Committee Chair. "This joint hearing gave us an opportunity to learn how schools and local public health departments are collaborating to develop innovative models to keep our children healthy."

New and existing measures to fight the epidemic of childhood obesity were included in the Working Group's recommendations. Their focus was on physical activity and improved nutrition habits. Among other recommendations, measures included in the proposal range from encouraging 60 minutes of daily activity to innovative Farm-to-School programs that connect children with healthy foods and provide the opportunity to learn how to live healthier lifestyles.

Lawmakers stressed that legislative action is urgently needed, but that mandates that restrict the decision-making abilities of local governments and school districts should be avoided.

"Childhood obesity is an epidemic adversely affecting the health and education of Minnesota's children," said state Rep. Carlos Mariani (DFL-St. Paul), House K-12 Policy Committee Chair. "As a state, we have a responsibility to promote and support healthy lifestyles for our young people – their physical and mental growth literally depend on it. Proposals discussed today can begin the process of building a healthier Minnesota, with little impact to the state's budget."

Legislation addressing childhood obesity will be considered when the legislature reconvenes February 4th.