

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 224 – NELSON
PROVIDED BY: SUSAN HOFF, UNITED WAY METROPOLITAN DALLAS
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Good Morning Madam Chair and esteemed Committee members. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you this morning. My name is Susan Hoff and I am the Senior Vice President of Community Impact for the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas. I am testifying today in support of Senate Bill 224.

There is little I can add in the way of data to augment Dr. Kenneth Cooper's research, not to mention his commitment to and passion for improving our children's health. He is truly one of Texas' brightest stars and the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas is deeply honored to be able to partner with the Cooper Institute to create a Healthy Zone School recognition project, which will begin in our North Texas Region this fall. We celebrated the official launch of the project on March 29th by announcing the first school to be recognized – Burks Elementary in McKinney ISD. (Thank you Senator Shapiro for the resolution recognizing this achievement) Twelve additional schools will be selected for the program in May. We received almost 100 applications for these few spots from across our region as well as from Brownsville, Lubbock and even New Jersey.

This overwhelming response tells us that our administrators, educators, and parents recognize the extreme need to improve the overall health of our school communities. They desperately want to know how they can address the growing epidemic of obesity and burgeoning health care costs. The United Way of Metropolitan Dallas is focused on improving educational and health outcomes. We are working with our community partners, corporate leaders, volunteers, and donors to increase by 50% the number of students who graduate from high school at the "college ready level" by 2020. We also aim to decrease the rate of childhood obesity in our region 20% by 2020. These efforts will go hand and hand.

As Dr. Cooper so eloquently explained, student health is highly correlated with academic outcomes. Children who subsist on a steady diet of soda and high fat, starch and sugar don't have the fuel they need to do well in school. And those who have little or no opportunity for daily physical activity and exercise are also challenged. Many children consume half of their daily meals at school and spend more of their waking hours there than any place else. Therefore, changing the school environment is one of the best and most effective ways to impact children's health.

We are committed to working with the private sector to provide resources and support to schools that want to make changes in their policies and practices. Passage of Senate Bill 224 will add the incentive of state recognition for their successful efforts. This bill is not a mandate. School participation is completely voluntary. It capitalizes on the power of positive reinforcement for schools, educators, parents and students and leverages the resources of the private sector to make a lasting difference for generations of children.

We urge you to support this legislation. Thank you.