



## **Testimony in Favor of S. 334 An Act to Improve Physical Education**

**January 31, 2006**

Good afternoon, Chairman Antonioni, Chairwoman Haddad and members of the Education Committee. My name is Roberta Friedman, and I'm Education Director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association. MPHA is a statewide membership organization that champions policies and programs that prevent illness, disease, and injury.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in favor of S. 334, An Act to Improve Physical Education.

We first want to thank Senator Tom McGee for sponsoring this legislation and for helping bring attention to a critical problem and an important solution.

Our nation is experiencing an epidemic of childhood obesity. There are serious and tragic health consequences associated with this epidemic, including diabetes, asthma, heart disease, and depression. According to the Centers for Disease Control, obesity is responsible for 112,000 deaths per year, nearly three times the toll from alcohol and drugs. The CDC also reports that 1 in 3 children born in the year 2000 will develop Type II diabetes.

There are two components to healthy fitness and weight. The first is what we eat and how much. The second is how much we exercise. Unfortunately, so much of our society seems to conspire against after-school physical recreation. Playstations and other video games keep kids glued to their couches. In some urban communities, violence keeps kids inside, while suburban sprawl keeps other kids at home. Budget problems result in reductions in sports programs.

Yet, children spend half their waking hours in school. Clearly, school is a place where they learn habits that last a lifetime. For the sake of their health, we need to ensure that schools are encouraging healthy habits. Another bill that MPHA supports, H. 4452, promotes healthy eating by prohibiting the sale of junk food and soda in schools. Similarly, we believe that S. 334 promotes a common sense approach to encouraging a life-long appreciation of exercise.

At the same time, MPHA understands the constraints under which our public schools operate, both in terms of time and money. One reason we support boosting state revenue is to help provide more funding for our schools. We understand that schools face many needs and demands, and that it is difficult, if not nearly impossible, to reconcile all of them.

Nonetheless, we, as a Commonwealth, must own up to our responsibility to protect the health of our children. We encourage the committee to support S. 334.