

# **Statement by Councilmember Phil Mendelson**

## **Nutrition Labeling at Fast Food and Other Chain Restaurants**

**July 16, 2003**

Obesity is the fastest rising health problem in this country, doubling in adults over the last twenty years. Rates have also doubled in children and tripled in teens over the last two decades. In the District, over half of adults are overweight or obese; and 15 percent of high school students are obese.

Unhealthy diets and physical inactivity are leading causes of death, disability, and high health care costs in the District. Poor diets and physical inactivity cause about 1,000 premature deaths in the District each year--from heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Heart disease alone costs District families, businesses, and government about \$135 million annually in health-care and related costs.

A few months ago I was told to reduce my cholesterol. I've found this to be much easier at home, where almost all the foods and beverages we buy from the supermarket provide nutrition information. But eating out is tough. I was surprised to learn that a large shake from McDonald's has about half a day's worth of calories, or that a large white chocolate mocha and cinnamon scone from Starbucks has 1,130 calories.

The nutritional quality of restaurant foods vary widely, and without nutrition information, it is difficult to compare options. The legislation I have introduced, with five co-sponsors, would require fast-food and other chain restaurants with ten or more locations nationally to provide on their menus the facts about calories, saturated plus trans fat, carbohydrates, and sodium per menu item. On menu boards, where there is less space, the nutrition information may be limited to calories. The legislation affects chain restaurants and exempts mom and pop establishments.

Basic nutrition labeling will help people make informed choices about their diet. Most folks support this—and why not, it helps them to be healthier. Given the cost of diet related diseases, we can't afford not to do this.