December 3, 2012

Mr. Philippe Dauman
President and Chief Executive Officer
Viacom Inc.
1515 Broadway
New York, New York 10036

Ms. Cyma Zarghami
President, Nickelodeon
Viacom Inc.
1515 Broadway
New York, New York 10036

Dear Mr. Dauman and Ms. Zarghami:

We, the undersigned, write to ask Nickelodeon to strengthen its commitment to children by better addressing food marketing to children. We appreciate that your company has taken some steps to limit licensing of Nickelodeon characters for use in the marketing of some food products. This action demonstrates that you recognize that food marketing impacts children’s food choices and requests. Accordingly, we urge you to implement strong nutrition standards for all of the company’s food marketing to children, including all television advertising on Nickelodeon channels (including Nickelodeon, NickToons, TeenNick, and Nick Jr.), company Internet sites, mobile platforms, and other places Nickelodeon reaches children. We also urge you to strengthen your policy on the use of licensed characters by applying specific nutrition standards to their use.

As you know, childhood obesity rates are at record-high levels. Research shows that food marketing is an important factor contributing to children’s poor diets and obesity. The National Academies’ Institute of Medicine (IOM) conducted a thorough review of the science and concluded that food advertising affects children’s food choices, food purchase requests, diets, and health. In addition, the majority of foods marketed to children remain of poor nutritional quality. The IOM concluded that marketing puts children’s health at risk.

We appreciate Nickelodeon’s efforts to promote healthy lifestyles to children. However, such efforts are insufficient given the magnitude of the problem. Your PSAs, philanthropic activities, and partnerships with children’s groups do not counterbalance the effect of Nickelodeon’s core business and children’s exposure to unhealthy food marketing. The mix of Nickelodeon’s marketing remains out of balance, doing more to promote unhealthy than healthy eating. This contradicts the network’s claim that since 2002 it has “made childhood obesity a filter by which [it] reviews all our business initiatives.”
Nickelodeon lags behind the efforts of other children’s entertainment companies. For example, The Walt Disney Company recently announced plans to apply nutrition standards to advertisements through child-directed television, radio, and online sites, and update its nutrition standards for foods that can be advertised to children. ION media also has standards for food marketing to children.

As the number one entertainment company for children, Nickelodeon has enormous influence over children’s food choices and thus their lifelong habits and health. At a minimum, Nickelodeon should meet the food industry’s own baseline and join the Council for Better Business Bureaus’ Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative. Even better, Nickelodeon could show leadership by working towards implementing the Interagency Working Group food marketing guidelines. We hope you will use your influence to support parents and children.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Advocates for Better Children's Diets
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Academy of Sports Dietitians and Nutritionists
American Cancer Society
American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Institute for Cancer Research
American Medical Student Association
American Public Health Association
American School Health Association
Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors
Be Active New York State

Berkeley Media Studies Group, a project of the Public Health Institute
California Center for Public Health Advocacy
California WIC Association
Center for Communications, Health and the Environment (CECHE)
Center for Digital Democracy
Center for Science in the Public Interest
ChangeLab Solutions
Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition (WA)
Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC) at Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago
Defeat Diabetes Foundation
Directors of Health Promotion and Education
Earth Day Network
Environmental Working Group
Food Trust
Fooditude
FoodPlay Productions: Turning Kids on to Healthy Habits!
HealthyPlanet
Jamie Oliver Food Foundation
Latino Coalition for a Healthy California
LiveWell Colorado
Mercyhurst Institute for Public Health
MomsRising.org
National Action Against Obesity
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
National Congress of Black Women, Inc.
National Farm to School Network
National Physicians Alliance
National WIC Association
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New York State Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition
Oregon Public Health Institute
Partnership for Prevention
Praxis Project
Prevention Institute
Project MANA
Public Health Advocacy Institute
Public Health Institute
Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity
Shape Up America™
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
United States Water Fitness Association
Voices for America’s Children
Young People’s Healthy Heart Program

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