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Dear Members of the Wisconsin Congressional Delegation:

I am writing to you as the Chair of the Joint Legislative Council's Special Committee on Performance-Based Disease Management Programs for Large Populations. This study committee was established by the leadership of the Wisconsin Legislature to, among other things, formulate legislative responses to the profound obesity epidemic that has emerged in Wisconsin. The study participants were a diverse and knowledgeable group of Wisconsin citizens who are medical and policy experts in children's health and health policy. A list of the committee membership is enclosed with this letter.

Over its course of our study, we heard disturbing testimony regarding the escalating public and private costs of obesity. According to a report published by the National Conference of State Legislatures, being overweight or obese increases the risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cancer. These chronic diseases are the leading causes of death,

illness and disability in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated the total medical costs related to obesity in Wisconsin in 2003 at nearly \$1.5 billion. Taxpayers foot the bill for almost half of that amount through Medicare and Medicaid.

The CDC reports that during the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States. The CDC statistics for Wisconsin show that in 1990, the obesity rate was in the 10-14% range. Since then it increased steadily until 2006, when the rate was reported at 25-29%.

The committee received many suggestions for legislation to help address this epidemic, and we have recommended a package of legislation for introduction in the 2009-10 Wisconsin Legislative Session.

In addition to our package of state legislation, the committee strongly supports the enactment of federal legislation such as the proposed LEAN Act of 2008, which would amend the federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act to require restaurants to provide calorie counts and other nutritional information to consumers at the point of purchase. Disclosure of this information is of crucial importance for consumers of so-called "fast food," which is a major contributor to the obesity epidemic. Providing this information at the point of sale will help consumers make healthier choices. An additional benefit of this type of legislation was revealed when New York City passed an ordinance that required posting of nutritional information on menu boards resulted in many fast food chains. When faced with the prospect of consumers seeing the nutritional information at the moment they placed an order, many fast food chains reformulated their products to significantly decrease the fat and calorie content. This kind of change is urgently needed to address the health emergency in this country.

The Special Committee respectfully and urgently requests that you actively support legislation similar to the LEAN Act of 2008 in the 111th Congress of the United States.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have questions, please contact Rachel Letzing or Mary Matthias at the Legislative Council.

Sincerely,

Senator Julie Lassa, Chair
Special Committee on Performance-Based
Disease Management Programs for Large
Populations

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Enclosure