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Dear Dr. Butner:

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) thanks you for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans Mid-course Report: Strategies for Increasing Physical Activity Among Youth*. We enthusiastically support the Physical Activity Guidelines (PAGs) for Americans as a crucial component of promoting healthy lifestyles, and key to ASTHO's vision of healthy people thriving in a nation free of preventable illness and injury.

ASTHO is the national nonprofit organization representing public health agencies in the United States, the U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia. ASTHO members, the chief health officials of these jurisdictions, formulate and influence sound public health policy and ensure excellence in state-based public health practice. ASTHO members, along with our key public health partners and 20 affiliate organizations, represent key leadership in state and local health departments. We are uniquely qualified to promote the recommendations in the Physical Activity Guidelines (PAGs) for Americans and stand ready to work with our partners across various sectors to improve physical activity opportunities for all populations.

State and territorial health agencies, along with federal, state, and local governments, can provide the leadership necessary to increase opportunities for physical activity, improving the health outcomes and quality of life of all Americans. National and federal strategies such as the National Prevention Strategy and the Institute of Medicine's Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention Report, serve as a roadmap for state health agencies to address active living policies and programs across various sectors. Programs, such as Community Transformation Grants and Coordinated Chronic Disease Programs, also provide opportunities to support healthy and safe communities that encourage physical activity.

ASTHO believes that the PAGs are a key opportunity to bolster state health agency leadership in the prevention of obesity and other chronic diseases. The PAG mid-course report outlines various areas that state health agencies can support through policy and environmental changes in cooperation with agencies overseeing education, transportation, planning, health care, and other

sectors. We hope that other stakeholders in this arena see their state health agency as a key partner in this ongoing effort.

This mid-course report provides an opportunity for ASTHO to actively promote the PAGs to our members and highlight strategies to motivate children and adolescents to engage in physical activity. The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPA), which includes many science-based organizations, has pointed out that an ongoing review of the scientific evidence is needed to keep these guidelines up to date.

ASTHO commends the subcommittee of the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition for addressing physical activity in five critical settings for children – community, home and family, preschools and schools, and the primary care environment. We also commend the subcommittee for including children ages 3-5 in its report even though this age group originally was not included in the PAGs. This sub-group of the population along with parents and caregivers represent important targets for early intervention and the establishment of lifelong healthy behaviors.

ASTHO supports further policy development that would include physical activity standards for pre-school and child care centers tied to licensing, teacher training, and programming. Given that many state health agencies oversee licensing of child care centers, we are particularly interested in policy research to examine the effects of state and institutional policy innovations, such as the Massachusetts example cited. We also support policy development for before-and-after school programs including strategies such as joint-use agreements. The addition of physical activity standards, teacher training and outcome assessment, along with subsequent evaluation, will increase the evidence base and provide further rationale for these programs.

ASTHO supports the subcommittee's recommendations for the importance of enhanced physical education in all schools. Quality physical education engages students in health-promoting physical activity and teaches them the knowledge and skills necessary for lifetimes of physical activity. Quality physical education also should be supplemented, but not replaced, by additional school-based physical activity.

ASTHO agrees with the following recommendations set by the NCPA and the American Heart Association:

- Include language stressing the importance of assessing health and fitness in physical education programs. The recent addition of **FITNESSGRAM®** to the President's Youth Fitness Program allows states the opportunity to collect aggregate data on the health and fitness of children consistent among school districts across the country, providing an important baseline assessment for communities, educational leaders, parents, and policy-makers.
- Include on Page 2, Line 48 that physical education is a central component of childhood education with outcome measures similar to math and reading.

- Include on in Table 1 on Page 5, a statement on appropriate training for physical education teachers to prepare them with rigorous course background along with experiential learning to prepare them to teach enhanced physical education.
- Include language in Table 1 on Pages 5 and 6, under “next steps for research,” calling for longitudinal, observational studies to delineate the influence of family activity patterns and habits on success of PE interventions.
- Include a policy recommendation stressing the importance of prioritizing physical education in schools.

ASTHO agrees with the subcommittee’s effort to promote policies and programs to achieve the PAGs. The report should emphasize the importance of implementing policy after it is established, evaluating its effectiveness, and assessing any unintended consequences. ASTHO also supports the active transportation recommendations, including Safe Routes to School programs. We recommend the inclusion of additional wording on overcoming safety and liability issues, as these can be barriers to implementation.

ASTHO supports the subcommittee’s recommendation to use technology and social media to reach children with key messages. We agree that additional evidence is needed to understand the potential of active gaming to decrease sedentary behaviors and increase physical activity in children.

We also support the NCPPA recommendation to incorporate health impact assessments (HIA) into school construction projects to increase the evidence base around the importance of design and construction to increase physical activity in schools. An HIA is a great opportunity for schools and public health departments to partner with planners and other stakeholders to improve the school environment.

Schools should continue to integrate physical activity and physical education into their long-term strategic plans and hold their own institutions accountable for improving academic achievement, as well as the health and well-being of their students. Many studies have shown a positive link between physical fitness and academic performance, attendance, and behavior.

ASTHO congratulates the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition, and the subcommittee for its excellent mid-course report on the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.

We look forward to helping you disseminate this report when it is released and invite you to share with us how we might best support your efforts in this regard.

Sincerely,

Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO)