

Good morning Mr. Chairman. My name is Patrick Purcell and I am the Assistant to the President of United Food & Commercial Workers Union Local 1500. We are New York State's largest local union representing grocery store workers. Local 1500 represents over 23,000 workers employed by Pathmark, Stop and Shop, Shop Rite, King Kullen, Gristedes, Key Food, D'Agostino's, Fairway, and many other independent stores.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing today. The President of my Union, Bruce W. Both, sits on the New York State Food Policy Council and is a strong advocate for the development of a sound State food policy and system that fairly balances the needs of workers, consumers and employers. Through our Building Blocks Project, a campaign to bring supermarkets to underserved communities, our Union has proudly stepped out in front to work with community groups, elected leaders, healthcare advocates and many others to see to it that a smart food policy creates good food, good jobs and good health for all New Yorkers.

As to my Unions position on the three policy approaches being discussed here today let me say the following:

Our Union supports the idea of Calorie Labeling and a Trans Fat Ban. We do this with a clear caveat that our States elected officials work with representatives of the Food Industry Alliance to carve out thoughtful and prudent exemptions within the Supermarket Industry. I will defer to my colleague Michael Rosen representing the FIA who is here today to better outline those areas of concern. Our Union supports the FIA's request for certain exemptions.

Our Union opposes a Sugar Sweetened Excise Tax. I have heard this tax referred to as a "lifestyle tax". Keeping with that theme I can assure you that millions of New Yorkers live in communities where their lifestyle is chosen for them, not the opposite. Lack of access to full service supermarkets, limited income and minimal consumer choice is what leads many New Yorkers to choosing these products. This is no different than the debate we have been having for years about why these same communities have dozens of fast food places but no fresh fruit. So what's next? The Big Mac and Whopper tax?

No tax is going to change behavior that has as many barriers to change as these neighborhoods do and furthermore it is penalizing people who have limited ability to make that change if they could. Kill this tax now.

I want to leave you with a more important message Senator. The people of the State of New York need greater access to full service supermarkets. The connection between supermarkets and a community's health is clear. That would be both physical and economic health. I would implore the State and its elected officials to work with our Union and the supermarket industry representatives more closely. I have repeatedly asked that elected officials meet with us to better understand how supermarkets work and how the State is undermining industry growth and the growth of good jobs with their broad and incorrect assumptions about the industry and their well intended but misconceived food and tax policies. The assumption that all food retailers are alike is killing the industry and our member's jobs at the same time.

I would like to extend to you, as I have to others, an invite to walk with me around a Supermarket so we may help you and others have a clearer understanding of their operation. It seems to me that if supermarkets are going to continue to be the target of health, environmental and other groups seeking to instill lifestyle changes or some new way to generate revenue, then perhaps our elected leaders should understand the industry better.

In the meantime, perhaps increasing the tax on warehouse club memberships or grocery deliveries from places like Fresh Direct whose trucks pollute our city with their excessive idling could be considered as a revenue generator rather than a tax targeted at low income New Yorkers. Those are just two of many ideas I have for you to raise revenue.

I look forward to your response to my invite to meet with me at a Supermarket and if you do I can promise a lunch that will be low on sugar, free of Trans fats and will come with a clear understanding of its calorie count.

Thank you Senator.