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## Lawmakers target obesity with bill

### Chain restaurants may be required to post nutritional facts

BY LORRAINE B. ADAMS The Dominion Post

A proposed bill that would require chain restaurants to post nutritional facts is moving closer to becoming state law.

On Wednesday, the House of Delegates Health and Human Resources Committee discussed and then passed the bill onto the Committee on Government Organizations.

However, a delegate will ask that the bill bypass that group and go straight to a vote in the House.

Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, said restaurants in the state with more than 15 locations nationally would be required to clearly post the calories in food selections.

"We have a tremendous problem with obesity in West Virginia, and that leads to a tremendous increase in heart disease and diabetes and diseases that are preventable," she said.

Fleischauer, who is on the Health and Human Resources Committee, said the chairman of the committee, Don Perdue, D-Wayne, will ask that the Committee on Government Organization send the bill to the floor of the House of Delegates.

At Wednesday's meeting, which Fleischauer said included lively debate over the nutrition menu listing, Sen. Dan Foster, D-Kanawha, a physician, spoke. According to Fleischauer, Foster said many people believe the increase in obesity is attributable to eating outside the home more often, and that calorie content was the most important piece of nutritional information.

She said reservations expressed included the need for more information other than just calorie content, the burden to some restaurants because of the increased costs related to changing menus along with other items, and the concern of conflicting requirements should a national bill pass.

Despite the concerns, Fleischauer said the bill is a positive item.

"It's just for consumer awareness, and sometimes things that you would think would be good for you are in fact very, very high in calories," she said. "We really need to do things to encourage people to consider their choices in eating. "This is providing information to consumers. It's the same thing we do with food that is in the supermarket." Fleischauer said that 400 volunteers working on ways to improve health in the state worked on the bill.

Sen. Mike Oliverio, D-Monongalia, said he would not support the bill to have restaurants label the caloric value of their foods.

"These are private enterprise businesses," he said. "If they want to provide nutritional information, I would leave that up to them and in whatever manner they want to provide it."

He said the bill would be overly burdensome for businesses.

"I think the proposal of the listing calories is well-intentioned legislation, but you have to be careful in government that we don't step beyond our boundaries, and these businesses are free enterprises," Oliverio said. "Citizens make decisions of personal responsibility of what they consume and purchase."

Delegate Alex Shook, D-Monongalia, said he is in favor of the bill.

"I think that with the huge obesity problem — no pun intended — we have to do something to help curb the problem," he said. "This will be a small step. I don't think it's overly burdensome on the part of the fast-food restaurants."