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Working to Put Whole Milk Back on the School Lunch Menu

By Rep. Dan Moul (R-Adams), chairman
House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service, our nation's schools served more than 4.8 billion school lunches in 2019, but those meals did not include whole milk.

In 2010, Congress passed the bipartisan Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which amended nutrition standards in the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the National School Lunch Program. The new federal dietary guidelines, adopted in September of 2011, specified that in these programs, milk served to children must be low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim). While guidelines allowed flavorings and lactose-free, and other varieties of milk that met the specific dietary restrictions, whole milk (at least 3% fat) and reduced-fat milk (2%) was strictly prohibited.

A new bill would change that in Pennsylvania.

The House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, of which I am chairman, recently advanced legislation that aims to put whole and reduced-fat milk back on the school lunch menu. **House Bill 2397**, sponsored by Rep. John Lawrence (R-Chester/Lancaster), would permit school boards or other governing authorities of a school to purchase whole or reduced-fat Pennsylvania milk and make it available to Pennsylvania students.

The bill would require the state secretary of Education to notify schools of the change. It would further require the state attorney general to bring suit against the federal government or any other entity on behalf of a school to recover any funding withheld or revoked due to its action to allow whole and reduced-fat milk products in schools.

While whole and reduced-fat milk was dropped from the school lunch program on the premise that doing so would cut down on childhood obesity and encourage healthier eating, there is little evidence that it has. In fact, many believe whole milk tastes better than the low- and no-fat varieties and is more nutritious, and therefore, more children would drink it if it was available to them at school.

Instead, studies have shown a decline in school milk consumption since the low and no-fat milk law went into effect, and the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board contends a lot of the milk now being served to students ends up in the trash, depriving them of its nutritional benefits.

House Bill 2397 would not only benefit Pennsylvania school children, but our dairy industry as well. Farmers are paid according to how their milk is used. Sales of liquid milk bring the greatest return, thus a decline in milk consumption hurts their bottom line.

While the federal guidelines govern milk that crosses our state lines, it does not have the authority to dictate policies at the state, local and school district level with regard to products produced, processed and sold within our state borders. I oppose any attempt by the federal

government to determine what kind of milk our kids can drink. Under this bill, any attempt by the federal government to interfere in a school district's decision to allow Pennsylvania whole or reduced-fat milk could be challenged in court.

I was pleased to get House Bill 2397 voted out of my committee with unanimous bipartisan support. The bill is expected to go before the full House for consideration in the very near future. A companion bill is currently moving in the state Senate.

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