

**Statement of Fatima Cody Stanford, MD, MPH, MPA, MBA, FAAP, FACP, FAHA, FAMWA, FTOS- obesity medicine physician scientist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School on behalf of The Obesity Society in Support of Massachusetts Senate Bill 1127 and House Bill 1822**

On behalf of The Obesity Society (TOS), I would like to offer the Society's support for passage of Massachusetts Senate Bill (SB) 1127 and House Bill (HB) 1822, sponsored by Senator Rebecca Rausch and Representative Tram Nguyen, respectively. With more than 2,800 members, TOS' mission is to promote innovative research, effective and accessible care, and public health initiatives that will reduce the personal and societal burden of obesity. SB 1127/HB 1822 would make it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of height and weight in compensation, in terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, housing or public accommodations in the State of Massachusetts. I was personally thankful to have both of you attend my educational in person session on this topic in March 2020 prior to the MA State House closure secondary to the COVID-19 pandemic. Your commitment to this work is unprecedented.

In the United States, there has been a steady rise in the prevalence of obesity, with current data suggesting that 42.4% of adults and 18.5% of children have obesity<sup>i</sup>. In addition, data suggests that weight stigma and discrimination in the United States has been increasing; the prevalence of weight/height discrimination increased from 7% in 1995-1996 to 12% in 2004-2006<sup>ii</sup>. Overweight and obesity discrimination has many deleterious effects on the mental well-being and prosperity of those who have it. Weight discrimination creates health disparities; it heightens the risk of developing eating disorders and unhealthy weight control behaviors as well as increases the risk of higher BMI and metabolic disease development<sup>iii</sup>. Furthermore, a "wage penalty" has been reported on people who have overweight or obesity, especially for women<sup>iv</sup>. This data undermines individual and social prosperity of people living with overweight and obesity and perpetuates health inequalities for adolescents and adults in this population.

Even though weight discrimination has a negative impact on people's health and wellness and results in unequal academic and job opportunities, there is only one state in the United States, Michigan, that has an anti-weight discrimination law. Despite the overall lack of state level legislation, there are some cities in the United States that have made weight and height a protected category for antidiscrimination. These include San Francisco and Santa Cruz, California; Binghamton, New York; Madison, Wisconsin; and Urbana, Illinois.

We urge the Joint Committee on the Judiciary and Chairs Day and Eldridge to take swift action and support committee passage of SB 1127/HB 1822. This legislation will ensure social prosperity for many people who suffer from weight discrimination in employment in Massachusetts while creating a path forward for other states to achieve a similar goal.

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevalence of obesity and severe obesity among adults: United States, 2017-2018. Updated February 2020. Accessed June 1, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/produ cts/datab riefs/ db360.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Puhl RM, Brownell KD. Changes in perceived weight discrimination among Americans, 1995-1996 through 2004-2006. *Obesity (Silver Spring)* 2008;16:1129-1134.

<sup>3</sup> Puhl RM, Wall MM, Chen C, Bryn Austin S, Eisenberg ME, Neumark-Sztainer D. Experiences of weight teasing in adolescence and weight-related outcomes in adulthood: a 15-year longitudinal study. *Prev Med* 2017;100:173-179.

<sup>4</sup> Mason K. The unequal weight of discrimination gender, body size, and income inequality. *Soc Probl* 2012;59:411-435.

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