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White House Invites Local Officials to Join Let's Move Cities and Towns Campaign

First Lady's Initiative Seeks to Reduce Childhood Obesity

by Michael Karpman

As a major component of her signature initiative to reverse the nation's childhood obesity epidemic within a generation, First Lady Michelle Obama has called on cities and towns across the country to join her Let's Move! campaign.

"Ultimately, it's going to take all of us, and particularly all of you, our nation's mayors, all working together to help our kids get, and stay, healthy," said the First Lady. "It's about the kind of future we want for our kids. We need your ideas and input. We're looking to you to be leaders on the front-lines of this effort across the country. I look forward to working with all of you to give them that chance."

Let's Move Cities and Towns targets one of America's gravest public health threats and emphasizes the critical leadership mayors and other city leaders can provide to spur local action. Participating cities and towns agree to take simple steps that promote healthy eating and physical activity, choosing strategies that make sense for their own communities.

"Mayors and other city leaders have an historic opportunity to protect the health and well-being of our next generation," said NLC President Ronald O. Loveridge, mayor of Riverside, Calif. "If we fail to respond at this critical time, our communities will face the increased burdens

of poor health and higher health care costs for decades to come."

Impact of the Childhood Obesity Epidemic

Over the past three decades, childhood obesity rates in the U.S. have tripled, posing a serious threat to children's health. An estimated one-third of children born in 2000 or later could suffer from diabetes at some point in their lives, and many will be at higher risk for chronic health problems that include heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer and asthma.

In addition, childhood obesity may harm the long-term economic vitality of many cities and towns. The health care expenses of obesity-related diseases are estimated to cost families, businesses and governments up to \$147 billion per year.

Becoming a Let's Move City or Town

Cities and towns are in a prime position to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity by promoting physical activity and access to healthy food. Municipal officials can influence the design of their cities and towns to promote walking and biking, work to attract supermarkets to underserved neighborhoods and partner with school districts to promote healthy eating and physical fitness during and after school, among other steps.

Let's Move Cities and Towns encourages municipal



officials to adopt a long-term, sustainable and holistic approach to childhood obesity. Once an elected official signs up as a prospective Let's Move City or Let's Move Town, he or she will choose at least one significant action to take in the following 12 months in each of four areas:

1. Helping Parents Make Healthy Family Choices
2. Creating Healthy Schools
3. Providing Access to Healthy and Affordable Food
4. Promoting Physical Activity

Let's Move Cities and Towns participants will submit an end-of-year update describing the city's or town's actions. The White House will recognize these communities on the Let's Move! website, and mayors may be invited to participate in conference calls and events with White House and federal agency staff to celebrate successes and discuss ideas and challenges.

Building on City Progress

Since 2005, NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) has worked closely with city officials and state municipal leagues to identify promising and effective practices for reducing childhood obesity. Most recently, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Leadership for Healthy Communities national program, the institute launched a new initiative in 2010 to assist cities and towns in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi as they seek to expand access to recreation and healthy foods.

As a helpful starting point, the YEF Institute's action kit for municipal leaders on Combating Childhood Obesity highlights a menu of steps cities can take to promote healthy eating and active living. A new institute report, "Community Wellness," also offers detailed profiles of efforts in six cities to reduce

childhood obesity and promote healthy lifestyles.

Recognizing the leadership of NLC and its members on this vital public health issue, the White House has asked NLC and state municipal leagues to play a key role in promoting the Let's Move Cities and Towns initiative, working in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regional offices. City officials can learn more about the Let's Move Cities and Towns initiative at www.letsmove.gov/officials.php, which highlights a range of ideas for each of the four Let's Move! action areas.

Details: To sign up online for Let's Move Cities and Towns, please visit www.hhs.gov/intergovernmental/letsmove/index.html. For more information about the initiative and how your city can take action to reduce childhood obesity, please contact Leon Andrews at (202) 626-3039 or andrews@nlc.org.