



Seattle Human Rights Commission

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June 5, 2017

Mayor Ed Murray
600 4th Ave, 7th Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Seattle City Councilmembers
600 4th Ave, 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Sent via electronic message

RE: Rejecting removal of diet sodas from the sweetened beverage tax

Dear Mayor Murray and City Councilmembers:

We, the Seattle Human Rights Commission, write to express our concern regarding the Seattle City Council's May 31, 2017 decision to remove diet sodas from the sweetened beverage tax proposal that will be voted upon today. We believe this decision only exacerbates the disparate racial and socioeconomic impacts of an inherently regressive tax, and flies in the face of the legislation's Racial Equity Toolkit.

Without wading deeply into the merits of the legislation, the Commission is deeply concerned about the City Council's blatant disregard for the Racial Equity Toolkit analysis of the legislation. The Toolkit analysis made clear—and there is simply no question—that the proposed tax is “regressive in nature.” The Toolkit further stated that the amended legislation including diet sodas addressed inequities inherent in the bill. It stated that this change “was done as a result of requests from community advocates and supported by polls that have shown that diet drinks are preferred by wealthier individuals.”

Despite this, the City Council again excluded diet sodas from the legislation, creating a loophole that largely exempts wealthier individuals from the tax that more-disadvantaged populations will experience. It is also worth noting that this tax is not insubstantial; according to Councilmember Herbold's analysis, the proposed 1.75 cent/ounce tax will raise the price of a two-liter Coke from \$1.79 to \$2.97. This will have a real impact upon those who buy soda regardless of the ultimate health impacts, and it is unfair to exempt sodas that are consumed by wealthier individuals while targeting those consumed by historically disadvantaged populations. Excluding diet sodas also

reduces revenues that would ultimately spent on programs to reduce inequity—such as improving food access and education.

Through its Race and Social Justice Initiative, the City of Seattle has committed itself “to change the underlying system that creates race-based disparities in our community and to achieve racial equity.” Excluding diet soda from the sweetened beverage tax perpetuates race-based disparities. Worse yet, it does so notwithstanding the RSJI analysis explicitly stating as much and urging inclusion of diet sodas. We reject the City Council’s intentional disregard of the RET when re-amending this matter.

We urge the City Council and Mayor to again include artificially sweetened beverages in the impending sweetened beverage tax to reduce the relative burdens upon socioeconomically disadvantaged Seattle residents. We also urge the City Council and Mayor to avoid disregarding RSJI legislative analyses in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

The Seattle Human Rights Commission