



City of Seattle
Mayor Edward B. Murray

April 25, 2017

Honorable Bruce Harrell
Seattle City Council
600 4th Ave, 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Council President Harrell:

Today I am transmitting two pieces of legislation aimed at addressing racial inequities in health, education and opportunities in our city. The first is an ordinance authorizing the establishment of a Sweetened Beverage Tax, the revenue from which will fund investments in Birth to Five, K-12 Education, Post-Secondary Access, and Food Access programs. The second is a resolution supporting the Seattle Education Action Plan, a framework for funding and implementing programs aimed at eliminating the opportunity gap in education for African-American/Black students and other underserved students of color.

The sweetened beverage tax is designed to address the fact that diabetes and obesity have been on the rise for decades, and low income communities and communities of color continue to be disproportionately affected. Increased soda consumption is believed a driver of these growing public health challenges and similar taxes in other cities have shown early signs of a decrease in soda consumption. As outlined in the ordinance, the funds would support services that will promote school readiness and learning by focusing on services for the birth to five population; fund elements of the Seattle Education Action Plan which outlines a comprehensive plan to close the education opportunity gap; and improve access to healthy food for lower-income families. The funding plan is the result of extensive work with stakeholders and the design of the tax went through a Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) analysis which helped shape the final proposal. As a result of community conversations, the original proposal was changed to lower the overall tax, have diet drinks be subject to the tax and increase investments in healthy food access programs.

The issue of education is critical to this City's future, yet the racial disparities in our education system have been persistent for generations and are shameful. It is the responsibility of all of Seattle – the Seattle Public Schools, educators, parents, businesses, universities and colleges, philanthropies and community based organizations – to ensure children are ready for the 21st century economy. As part of approaching this challenge, last year the City engaged over 2,000 participants in community conversations, online forums and the first citywide education summit in 25 years. This input was brought to the Education Advisory Group, a group of 30 leaders from across the City, convened to identify the most effective strategies for elimination the education. Last November, the Advisory Group issued a series of recommendations, representing a unified roadmap partners from across the city of Seattle to work together in a coordinated way to ensure every Seattle child succeeds.

Now is the time to act on these recommendations. The Seattle Education Action Plan lays forth a plan for beginning to implement the recommendations identified as the highest priority by the Education Advisory Group. As a City, we will continue to collaborate with the Seattle Public Schools and institutional and community partners to implement these recommendations in partnership with the community in order to create the systemic changes and programmatic supports necessary to most effectively serve the students and families who have been underserved for too long.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. I look forward to continued work together to strengthen our community. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Ben Noble, City Budget Director about the Sweetened Beverage Tax or Dwane Chappelle, Director of the Department of Education and Early Learning on the Seattle Education Action Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward B. Murray", written over a large, light-colored oval-shaped mark.

Edward B. Murray
Mayor of Seattle

cc: Honorable Members of the Seattle City Council