

Another View: Food trucks add to the obesity crisis

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Tia Shimada, a nutrition policy advocate for California Food Policy Advocates, is responding to the Feb. 22 editorial "Ban on food trucks goes way too far," which stated "there are plenty of reasons to be skeptical that the legislation would work as intended."

Each day more than 6 million students attend public schools in California. An estimated one in three is on course to develop type 2 diabetes, a life-threatening but preventable disease. More than 10 percent of California's kids struggle with overweight and obesity, putting them at risk for disability and early death in adulthood. This alarming state of health poses a serious threat to California.

We can build environments on and around school campuses that promote health, safety and academic achievement. Assembly Bill 1678, authored by William Monning, D-Carmel, aims to cultivate such environments by eliminating a threat that specifically targets children. The intent of the bill is to regulate all mobile food vending – from food trucks to pushcarts – that purposefully seeks out students.

Before, during and after school, mobile vendors converge near campuses to sell chips, soda and a host of other unhealthy snacks. Our kids shouldn't face a gantlet of mobile vending just outside the school gates, especially when the food being offered is the very stuff that our policymakers and communities have worked so diligently to remove from school campuses.

Public discussion of AB 1678 has trumpeted the needs of gourmet food trucks above the needs of students. Those elite food trucks have sparked a popular culinary movement.

That movement, however impressive, should not trump the protection of California's kids. AB 1678 focuses on mobile vending because the unique hallmark of that business model – portability – is being used to target students.

Our state has made, and is making, landmark changes to school nutrition. School meals are shaking off their mystery-meat reputations of the past. New federal standards require more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, and healthy calorie ranges for all meals, among other key improvements.

Allowing mobile vending to encroach on school nutrition programs undermines these improvements and the important health messages that they convey to students.

Each day, school nutrition programs give students access to healthy, affordable meals and snacks. These are critical resources for all of California's kids, especially during these tough times. We cannot afford to undercut school nutrition programs by inviting unhealthy options to the school gate.

Creating environments that foster the long-term health and productivity of students is critical to the future of our state. AB 1678 is an opportunity for all Californians, legislators and food truck fans alike, to consider a much-needed policy that can protect students without injuring small businesses.

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