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While waiting for a morning departure out of an airport in NYC recently, I went to the Starbucks counter to get a coffee and something to eat. I was considering a croissant when I noticed that the calories were posted for each menu item. New York City requires restaurant chains like Starbucks to post calorie information for their foods at the point of purchase in the same size font as the price. Plain, regular-sized croissants were a whopping 1200 calories - nearly 2/3 of the recommended **daily** amount of calories for healthy, active adults. Knowing that the rest of my day was going to be spent in an airplane seat, I chose the 160 calorie oatmeal (with topping!) instead. By providing me with information on the food choices I was considering BEFORE I bought them, menu postings directly influenced my decision to choose a healthier option.

For the past 11 years, learning to read and understand nutrition labels on packaged foods has been part of every hands-on workshop taught by the Kids First team of professional chefs and nutritionists (over 3,400 workshops delivered to over 230,000 people in RI to date!). By teaching children, school staff, parents and caregivers how to look for and understand such things as calories per serving, calories from fat, sugar content and sodium milligrams, Kids First has helped thousands of Rhode Islanders make more informed and healthier food choices for themselves, their families or the students they serve.

The RI Legislature is considering a law that would require chain restaurants to post calorie totals for their standard menu items, just like in New York City. If passed, Rhode Island citizens would have the option of comparing the caloric content of the foods they are considering, before they purchase or eat them. Over-consumption of calories is one of the primary factors contributing to the American obesity epidemic. In the typical restaurant chain, a 2000 calorie appetizer, combined with a 2000 calorie main course followed by a 1700 calorie dessert tremendously exceeds the 2000-2500 calorie total that is recommended for most adults. Overweight adults (and children) are more likely to develop chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, asthma, sleep apnea and even tooth decay.

Calorie posting on menus in restaurant chains alone will not solve our nationwide obesity problem, but it would be a tool for those interested in making informed choices about what they purchase and eat. I know that RI schools are working hard to improve the foods they serve to their students and staff. All of us at Kids First believe it is time

for the food industry to join us and openly support our efforts to raise healthier children and healthier adults.

I ask Rhode Islanders who would like to know more about the content of the foods we eat to contact their senator and representatives in support of the Menu Labeling Bill. Then we in Rhode Island can also make our own informed decisions between the croissant or the oatmeal, depending on how active we plan to be that day.

*Dorothy Brayley is the Executive Director of Kids First, a Rhode Island non-profit that provides education and guidance to schools and communities encouraging the nutritional and physical well-being of children. She is Co-Chair of the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition and is the School Food Learning Lab Manager for the national project, School Food FOCUS (transforming Food Options for Children in Urban Schools.)*