

October 8, 2025

Dear San Francisco Commission Streamlining Task Force:

I have been an active member of Berkeley's Sugar Sweetened Beverage Product Panel of Experts (SSBPPE) but tonight I write to you as Berkeley citizen, a retired adjunct professor and nutrition specialist and the founder of Berkeley's Center for Weight and Health which became UC's premier nutrition policy institute. I have long followed soda tax experiences by communities, large and small. I am very concerned about a shift that would weaken or eventually eliminate San Francisco's Sugary Drinks Distributor Tax Advisory Committee (SDDTAC).

San Francisco's Distributor Tax Advisory Committee is similar in make-up to the diverse group of experts and community members found on Berkeley's SBBPPE Commission. A few years back our SBBPPE Commission was in line to be merged with another city commission. The merger effort failed because the idea was flawed.

Let me explain the reasons why a merger with a larger commission with a different mission is not good policy. First, a tax on soda is particularly vulnerable due to the powerful and well-funded efforts of the beverage industry to weaken or even reverse the tax. Advisory Committee members follow the science, interpret and communicate this information. And the committee members act as a bridge to the larger community sharing information, identifying community funding priorities and having an ear to the ground. A soda tax can easily be misunderstood, and a dedicated Committee is critical.

There may come a time when San Francisco decides to increase the rate of taxation, similar to what happened with tobacco taxation, and having a knowledgeable, dedicated and hard-working committee will ensure community understanding and support of the effort.

Berkeley recently went back to the voters to make the soda tax permanent, and we were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the victory. I attribute the victory at the polls to a SSB Commission that works closely with city staff and policymakers, as well as community leaders.

The soda tax is working in California and Kaiser Permanente researchers have published data showing a decrease in the body mass index of California children living in cities with a soda tax. When we have successful public health measures, it behooves us to do all we can to protect and enhance the efforts, rather than to seek changes that may weaken the existing support structure of the measures.

I urge the Commission Streamlining Task Force to leave the current San Francisco's Distributor Tax Advisory Committee in its current form to ensure the continued success of this critical tax effort.

Sincerely yours, Pat Crawford, DrPH, RD