



Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood

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August 29, 2005

Herbert Allison, CEO
Amy Muska O'Brien, Director of Social Investing
TIAA-CREF
730 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Allison and Ms. O'Brien,

CCFC
STEERING COMMITTEE:

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We are writing to urge you to remove The Coca-Cola Company from the CREF Social Choice Account. A company that undermines the health of children through the aggressive marketing of nutritionally deficient products is not a social choice. As of December 31, 2004, the CREF Social Choice Account included 1,182,800 shares – valued at nearly \$50 million – of Coca-Cola stock.

Obesity is a serious and growing problem for children. Since 1980, the proportion of overweight children ages 6-11 has doubled to 15.3%; for adolescents, the rate has tripled to 15.5%.¹ Overweight children are at risk for a number of medical problems, including hypertension, asthma,² and type II diabetes, a disease used to found primarily in adults.³ The *New England Journal of Medicine* recently reported that, if left unchecked, the rapid rise of childhood obesity and its attendant health problems, may shorten children's life expectancies by as much as five years.⁴

Obesity rates have risen in tandem with a startling increase in soft drink consumption. Since 1950, per capita sweetened soda consumption has increased four-fold.⁵ Sweetened drinks constitute the primary source of added sugars in the diet of children.⁶ The chance that a child will be overweight increases with each daily serving of sugared soft drinks they consume.⁷ There is a growing consensus that soft drinks are contributing to health problems for children, which is why the American Academy of Pediatrics⁸, the American Dental Association⁹, and others in the public health community have called for restrictions on soft drink marketing.

And yet, as the epidemic of childhood obesity worsens, Coca-Cola is spending more money and finding new ways to market products to children in the hopes of developing lifetime brand loyalty. Coca-Cola's guidelines for marketing to children state, "The Coca-Cola Company and its local bottling partners do not aim or direct any marketing activity from any source to children under the age of 12,"¹⁰ but a quick glance at some of Coke's marketing practices demonstrate this claim is simply not true. There are Coke toys such as checker sets and cars that are designed to introduce kids as young as two to the Coca-Cola brand. Coke's product placement is ubiquitous on American Idol, a top-rated show for children ages 2-11.¹¹ Coke's sponsorship of films such as the Harry Potter movies is clearly designed to reach young children.



Coca-Cola also markets aggressively to children in schools. In 2003, in response to growing concern about the presence of soft drinks in schools, Coca-Cola announced its so-called Model Guidelines for School Beverage Partnerships.¹² These guidelines seem more about public relations than about restricting middle and high school students. They also permit the marketing of sugar-laden “sports drinks” to younger children. The guidelines even permit the use of the Coca-Cola logo on materials promoting health and nutrition education.

Across the country, advocates for children and public health have fought for legislation that would remove sweetened beverages from our nation’s schools. But time and time again these efforts have been undermined by Coca-Cola’s intense lobbying efforts. In Indiana, Coca-Cola sent five lobbyists to defeat a bill that would have reduced soda sales in schools by fifty percent.¹³ In Oregon, Coca-Cola was a leading opponent of attempts to phase out the sale of junk food and sugar-laden soft drinks from public schools, and ultimately helped defeat the legislation. In Connecticut, Coca-Cola’s lobbyist was instrumental in getting Governor Jodi Rell to veto what would have been the nation’s strongest school-based nutrition law.¹⁴

A company that actively lobbies against policies that would improve children's diets and address childhood obesity is not a social choice. A company that aggressively markets empty calories to children is not a social choice. It is time for TIAA-CREF to offer a real social choice to its investors by offering funds that do not include The Coca-Cola Company.

Sincerely,

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 Makani Themba-Nixon, Executive Director, The Praxis Project
 Laurie True, MPH, Executive Director, California WIC Association
 Rob Williams, PhD, Board President, Action Coalition for Media Education
 Margo G. Wootan, Dsc, Director, Nutrition Policy, Center for Science in the Public Interest

¹ Ogden, CL., Flegal, KM, Carroll, MD. & Johnson, CL. (2002). Prevalence and trends in overweight among US children and adolescents, 1999–2000. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 288:1728–32.

² American Academy of Pediatrics. (2003). Policy Statement: Prevention of Pediatric Overweight and Obesity. *Pediatrics*, 112(2): 424-430.

³ Sinha, R, Fisch, G, Teague, B., et al. (2002). Prevalence of Impaired Glucose Tolerance Among Children and Adolescents With Marked Obesity. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 346(11): 802-810.

⁴ Olshansky, SJ, Passaro, DJ, Hershov, RC., Layden, J, Carnes, BA., Brody, J, Hayflick, L, Butler, RN, Allison, DB, & Ludwig, DS (2005). A Potential Decline in Life Expectancy in the United States in the 21st Century. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 352: 1138-1145.

⁵ Putnam JJ, & Allshouse JE (1999). Food consumption, prices, and expenditures, 1970–97. Washington, DC: Food and Consumers Economics Division, Economic Research Service, US Department of Agriculture.

⁶ Guthrie JF, & Morton JF (2000). Food sources of added sweeteners in the diets of Americans. *Journal American Dietetic Association*, 100: 43–51.

⁷ Ludwig, DS, Peterson, KE & Gortmaker, SL. (2001). Relation Between Consumption of Sugar-Sweetened Drinks and Childhood Obesity: a Prospective, Observational Analysis. *The Lancet*. 357: 505-08.

⁸ American Academy of Pediatrics (2004). Policy Statement: Soft drinks in schools. *Pediatrics*, 113 (1): 142-154.

⁹ American Dental Association (2002). ADA Weighs in on Vending Machines. www.adad.org/publicmedia/releases/0202.

¹⁰ http://www.coca-colahbc.com/cms/view.php?dir_pk=17&cms_pk=256

¹¹ Nielsen Media Research, Cited in Cynthia Turner's Cynopsis: Kids! (email newsletter), 2005 January 2 – June 2, 2005.

¹² http://www2.coca-cola.com/ourcompany/hal_school_beverage_guidelines.pdf

¹³ Simon, M (2005, June 7). Comments to the Federal Trade Commission re: Food Marketing to Kids Workshop. Available at <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/ftcworkshop/cifccomments.pdf>.

¹⁴ Simon, M. (2005, June 16). Another state falls victim to the Junk Food Lobby. *Common Dreams*. Available at <http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0616-26.htm>.