Interagency Working Group on Food Marketed to Children Proposed Nutrition Principles and Marketing Definitions Public Forum, May 24, 2011 Margo G. Wootan, D.Sc. Center for Science in the Public Interest On behalf of the Food Marketing Workgroup

I am testifying today on behalf of the Food Marketing Workgroup, a coalition of about 100 organizations and academic experts who work together on food marketing to children. The Food Marketing Workgroup strongly supports the Interagency Working Group's (IWG) proposed nutrition principles and marketing definitions for food marketing to children.

The Working Group's nutrition principles and marketing definitions are much needed. The problem of childhood obesity is dire. Of course many factors contribute to children's poor diets, but food marketing plays a key role.

Children are constantly inundated with food marketing through increasingly sophisticated and ubiquitous marketing approaches, which affect their food choices, diets, and health. The Working Group guidelines, if adopted by industry, would make a vital contribution to addressing childhood obesity.

We're encouraged by the fact that the current self-regulatory approach has spurred product reformulation and led to the first reductions in unhealthy food marketing to children in decades. As you know, 17 companies have agreed to participate in self-regulation through the Council of Better Business Bureaus' Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI). However, several studies show that the vast majority of marketed products still are high in calories, saturated fat, sodium, or added sugars and low in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, or key nutrients.

Self-regulation has not been as effective as it could be because each company has its own set of nutrition standards. While there are many common elements of those standards, there also are small but strategic differences that weaken their impact. The proposed Interagency Working Group principles would provide a consistent set of national marketing standards, which are solidly based on consensus recommendations and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Our children deserve no less.

Another flaw in the current self-regulatory system is that companies' marketing policies don't cover all the approaches they use to market food to children. For example, few cover on-package marketing or branded fundraising in schools. We strongly support that the Working Group principles would apply to all marketing approaches companies use to reach children.

We understand that the adoption of the marketing principles won't be easy; but few important actions are. Companies have vowed to be a part of the solution to the national obesity crisis, and eliminating unhealthy food marketing to children is an essential part of that solution. The Interagency Working Group marketing principles address the key gaps in self-regulation and would help to make it effective.

We urge the Interagency Working Group to address the public comments and release the final marketing principles soon. Please don't make families wait much longer.

We also urge the CFBAI and all companies that market to children to adopt the voluntary standards. We especially encourage restaurants and media companies, who have been lagging behind food and beverage manufacturers in the national self-regulatory effort, to adopt these sensible, self-regulatory guidelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We will provide more detailed recommendations in our written comments.