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Support Increasing for State and Federal Laws To Protect Children from Weight-Based Bullying

Hartford, Conn. – Parental support for enactment of laws and policies to protect youth from weight-based bullying is strong and has increased over the past two years, according to a new study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut.

All 50 states currently have anti-bullying laws, but only three states include body weight as a characteristic that places youth at risk of being bullied. Many school districts have anti-bullying policies, yet body weight is often overlooked.

“Our new findings suggest that parental support for improved legal protections against weight-based bullying is present, consistent and strong,” said Rebecca Puhl, a study author and Deputy Director of the Rudd Center. “Parental voices can be influential in mobilizing advocacy efforts, and enacting policy change affecting children’s health.”

The study findings, published today in the journal *Pediatric Obesity*, can inform policy discussions about remedies for weight-based bullying among youth as increasing national attention is being paid to this issue. This research was funded by a donation from Rudd Foundation and a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

The study involved online questionnaires of diverse national samples of parents in 2014 and 2015, totaling 1,804 parents over the two years.

Specific findings of the study include:

- Parental support has been consistently high (at least 81 percent) over the past two years for policies to address weight-based bullying in youth at the school, state and federal levels.
- Support appears to have increased over the past two years for measures to better protect youth from weight-based bullying through improvements to state anti-bullying laws (87.9 percent – up from 84.7 percent) and through enactment of federal legislation (86 percent – up from 81 percent).

- While previous research has shown that mothers express more support than fathers for similar types of policies, this new study found no gender difference, suggesting that fathers' support for these measures may be increasing.

"As a next step, it will be important to communicate with policy makers and school officials to identify interest and feasibility of viable policy initiatives, and to examine potential avenues for enacting change through law," Dr. Puhl said.

Study co-authors include Young Suh and Xun Li of the UConn Rudd Center.

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About the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a distinguished multi-disciplinary policy research center dedicated to promoting solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy. The Rudd Center is a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet and activity patterns by conducting research and educating policy makers and the public. For more information, visit www.uconnruddcenter.org or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/uconnruddcenter or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/uconnruddcenter.