



LOUISIANA SENATE

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Work Out Now: WON Louisiana Initiative Filed by Senator Fred H. Mills, Jr.,

Taking the fight against obesity to the local level

Breaux Bridge, La. – Today, State Sen. Fred H. Mills, Jr., of St. Martin Parish, revealed his vision for fighting the obesity epidemic in Louisiana. In a session that is going to be dominated by fiscal woes, Mills has his own idea about how to save money and improve lives. Senate Bill (SB) 116 creates the Work Out Now: WON Louisiana Legislative Commission. It is fitting that he made this announcement in the small town of Breaux Bridge, La. and not from the Capitol, because down at the local level is where he is taking his fight.

“We have studied obesity and its detrimental effects at the federal and state level for years. There are enough reports, plans, strategies, and initiatives on it to fill a bayou, and yet Louisiana still ranks number one in the entire nation for obesity, something’s wrong with that picture,” said Mills.

According to Mills, what’s wrong is that the fight is in the wrong hands and he made that clear in the legislative intent of SB 116. The bill states that “the greatest resource in tackling any problem that impacts a community is the community itself.” Empowering local elected officials with the resources and tools needed to mobilize their communities to get physically active is the cornerstone of the legislation.

“We don’t need to reinvent the wheel, we need to bring the wheel to our local leaders,” said Mills. “Other states have done this very successfully and with the passion our local leaders have for their people I know this can be a success in Louisiana.”

When asked why he would bring this bill now, Mills replied, “Why Not?” According to a study referenced in the bill, in 2014 alone, the Louisiana Medicaid program spent more than \$98 million on obesity-related payments for services. In addition, a 2012 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation assessment stated that a cumulative five percent body mass index reduction in children and adults in Louisiana could save the state \$9 billion by 2030. Those staggering figures, and such a passion for the issue by his local elected officials, were all Mills needed to convince him that now was the perfect time to file this bill.

“When you are facing budget challenges you have to look at the big picture,” said Mills. “Poor health costs money, period.”

In his proposal, the Work Out Now: WON Louisiana Commission, made up of legislators representing the health, education and local government committees will work closely with local elected officials throughout the state to implement real physical activity opportunities for their citizens.

“This is not going to be a show or photo op to pretend we are doing something,” said Mills, “this is going to be real-life, roll-up your sleeves and make something happen at the local level to improve people’s lives.” Mills says the local leaders in his part of the state are already geared-up about it; in fact they want him to up the ante and help orchestrate contests and city versus city challenges. “I talked to the folks here and they are up to the challenge,” said Mills. “All of the tools are there, we are simply changing the delivery method and I know partnering with the locals is the only way to win this fight.”

SB 116 creates the Work Out Now: WON Louisiana Legislative Commission. The duties of the commission include aligning prevention activities at the local level; facilitating partnerships among local leaders and with public and private entities; bringing awareness to resources that are already available to communities, but underutilized, like joint use agreements; and fostering a healthy competition among and between similar-sized communities. The full legislature will vote on the proposal during the upcoming session that begins on April 10, 2017. For a full copy of SB 116, please visit www.legis.la.gov.

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