

First Lady Michelle Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
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October 25, 2013

Dear Mrs. Obama:

The undersigned organizations and individuals ask you to please reconsider your upcoming appearance on *The Biggest Loser* television show. Your endorsement of this show will unintentionally condone unhealthy weight loss behaviors and the stigmatization of people living in larger bodies, both of which undermine your efforts to promote healthy lives in children and adults. *The Biggest Loser's* approach to weight loss is well-known amongst those in the medical community as well as eating disorder and obesity specialists to fuel *higher* weights and the development and maintenance of life-threatening eating disorders. These unhealthy strategies are impacting and adding to the more than 30 million children, adolescents, and adults that suffer from life-threatening body image and eating disorders in the United States alone.

Your appearance on *The Biggest Loser* would have physical health, mental health and social implications that negatively impact your efforts to promote a healthy and happy population and we, the undersigned, have to come together to express why that is.

Research demonstrates that this show specifically increases negative feelings toward and promotes stereotypes of larger individuals, and does not motivate movement – in fact, it decreases motivation. (Attached, with research on weight stigma from Yale Rudd Center)

Shows like *The Biggest Loser* are at the forefront of promoting the negative feelings that have fueled the increase of body bullying amongst children and adults. Both the overt and not-so-obvious stigma are sending a message loud and clear to the public: obese individuals should pursue and withstand any means necessary to lose weight even if it includes discrimination, humiliation, bullying, and dangerous weight loss tactics. This is damaging both mentally and physically and the consequences are long-term and sometimes life-threatening.

A recent study published in the Journal of Pediatrics shows that almost 50% of obese children go on to have disordered eating in adolescence due to body shame and stigma. This research combined with the prevalence of weight-based bullying makes it obvious why children have increased unsafe dieting behavior and, for some, suicide to end the pain of living in their bodies.

The Biggest Loser has amongst its alumni several members who are willing to speak to the horrors they endured and the weight gain, eating disorders, depression, and anxiety they have struggled with subsequent to participating on the show. Season 3 participant Kai Hibbard is part of our coalition and is eager to express to you that this is not a sustainable means to a healthy end. She has penned a letter that is included in the attached package of information for your use.

Research shows those who try to lose weight using *The Biggest Loser* and other extreme and unhealthy approaches often develop acute body dissatisfaction and a focus on weight loss in particular that predicts poor and disordered eating and fitness habits, diminished health and actual weight gain.

Dr. Wendy Oliver-Pyatt, MD, Fellow, Academy of Eating Disorders and Certified Eating Disorders Specialist, explains, “The ‘serial dieter’ repeatedly goes from restriction to bingeing, and over time may gain more and more weight. This cycle is called weight cycling and can lead to very serious medical/physical (and emotional) consequences. The medical consequences of weight cycling may in fact be more serious and life threatening than the consequences of ‘stable obesity’.” The weight-centric ‘success’ that the contestants experience while on the show, that the audience is encouraged to use as their own measure of success, is not sustainable nor is there any emphasis on healthy behavioral maintenance. Because of this focus, people engage in repeated efforts to reduce their size through measures that are damaging to their body due to lack of the appropriate amount of food and over-strenuous exercise.”

We are concerned that your status as a leader and champion of children’s health will implicitly condone the negative behaviors and outcomes stated above. **We ask you to reconsider your participation and find a healthier vehicle to promote your *Drink More Water* campaign.**

In addition, the undersigned stakeholders ask that you engage in a serious conversation with us to stop the unintended consequences of the *Let’s Move* campaign. Our research, advocacy, and experience are missing from both the message and the framework of the *Let’s Move* campaign and we would like to help close the gap between the intended outcome of happier and healthier children and what too often has turned out to be the case – stigmatization, disordered eating, body hate and sanctioned bullying.

This community is concerned about and advocates on behalf of people who are stigmatized, discriminated against, and who endure the trauma of bullying due to their size. As such, we regularly support people who live these experiences due in part to the *Let’s Move* campaign, and, to a larger degree, the assumption that shows like *The Biggest Loser* are an appropriate means of seeking improved health or acceptable ways to motivate people within their work, school or community.

Please reconsider your appearance on *The Biggest Loser* and also, please accept our offer to meet with you and your staff to work through the harmful aspects of your well intentioned program. We are ready and eager to help.

Thank you for your consideration.

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