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TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

US HOUSE JOINS SENATE IN PASSING NAACP-SUPPORTED RESOLUTION FOCUSING NATIONAL ATTENTION ON ADDRESSING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

NAACP-SUPPORTED MEASURE DECLARING SEPTEMBER NATIONAL CHILDHOOD OBESITY AWARENESS MONTH PASSES BOTH HOUSE AND SENATE

THE ISSUE:

Obesity rates have soared among all age groups, increasing more than four-fold among children ages 6 to 11 over the last 40 years. Currently, 31.8 percent or 23,000,000 children and teenagers ages 2 to 19 are obese or significantly overweight. Sadly, major disparities exist among the obesity rates of children based on race and poverty; for example 38 percent of Mexican-American children and 34.9 percent of African-American children ages 2 to 19 are overweight or obese, compared with 30.7 percent of White children and 39.5 percent of low-income American Indian and Alaska Native children ages 2 to 5 who are overweight or obese.

The toll that this problem is taking on the children and their families, not to mention the Nation as a whole, is immense. Psychologically, obese children and adolescents are targets of early and systematic social discrimination, leading to low self-esteem which, in turn, can hinder academic and social growth and functioning. Physically, it has been proven that obese young people have an 80 percent chance of being obese adults and are more likely than children of average weight to become significantly overweight or obese adults, and therefore more at risk for associated adult health problems, including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, stroke, several types of cancer, and osteoarthritis. Not only does childhood obesity lead to physical and emotional problems, but it can be fiscally draining on the individuals, their families, and the country. People in the United States spend about 9 percent of their total medical costs on obesity-related illnesses, which equates to as much as $14 billion per year in direct health care costs.

Along with champions in Congress and the Administration, including First Lady Michelle Obama and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, the NAACP is supporting a multi-pronged approach to combating childhood obesity. This approach includes promoting and ascribing to healthier diets, increasing physical activity, and educating parents and children alike as to the problems associated with childhood obesity and how to avoid this problem that continues to grow at an alarming rate. As such, the NAACP supports H. Res. 996 and S. Res. 412, companion resolutions designating September as National Childhood Obesity Awareness month. We were especially pleased to see S. Res. 412 pass the Senate by unanimous consent on March 26, 2010 and H. Res. 996 pass the U.S. House of Representatives on May 20, 2010 by a unanimous voice vote. These resolutions call for Members of Congress and the Administration to use the month of September to raise public awareness and mobilize the country to address childhood obesity.