

# Puerto Rico considers fining parents of obese children

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Legislators in Puerto Rico are debating a bill that would fine parents of obese children up to \$800 if they don't lose weight.

The bill aims to improve children's wellbeing and help parents make healthier choices, Sen. Gilberto Rodriguez said in a statement issued Monday.

Public hearings for the bill are scheduled to begin Friday.

If approved, public school teachers would flag potential obesity cases and refer them to a counselor or social worker, depending on the severity of the case. Health Department officials would then meet with the parents and determine whether the obesity is a result of bad eating habits or a medical condition. They also would create a diet-and-exercise program combined with monthly visits to ensure it's being followed.

After six months, officials would evaluate the child again, with parents possibly facing between \$500 and \$800 in fines if the situation does not improve within another six months to a year.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control defines childhood obesity as having a body mass index or above the 95th percentile for children of the same age and sex.

Several doctors including the president of Puerto Rico's chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics have spoken out against the measure,

saying it is unfair.

More than 28 percent of children in Puerto Rico are considered obese, compared with some 18 percent in the U.S. mainland.

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