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February 28, 2012

Linda Matzigkeit  
Senior Vice President, Strategic Planning and Human Resources  
Children's Healthcare of Atlanta  
Administration  
1600 Tullie Circle NE  
Atlanta, GA 30329

CC:  
Ron Frieson  
Senior Vice President, External Affairs, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

Stephanie Walsh, MD  
Medical Director, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

Kevin McClelland  
Public Relations Director, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

Dear Ms. Matzigkeit,

We are writing you today on behalf of the following organizations in regards to the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's (CHOA) "Strong4Life" childhood obesity awareness campaign. Since the inception of this campaign in early 2011, multiple organizations have reached out to the leadership of CHOA expressing concerns regarding the "Strong4Life" campaign. The "Strong4Life" campaign greatly perpetuates the negative stigma and bias associated with the disease of childhood obesity. **In a public survey, 82% feel the campaign is offensive and 81% feel the campaign is hurtful toward children.**

We agree with CHOA that the need for increased awareness about the seriousness of childhood obesity is great. However, despite the well-meaning intentions of CHOA, this campaign instead reflects a misguided approach that is unlikely to be effective and may inadvertently worsen obesity and harm the very people who are most in need of help. Scientific evidence shows that obese children and adults who feel shamed, blamed, or stigmatized because of their weight are instead likely to eat more food, engage in unhealthy eating behaviors (such as binge-eating), and exercise less, which promotes weight gain and impairs efforts to lose weight. Instilling shame and stigma towards overweight youth and their families is an inappropriate and ineffective way to address childhood obesity.

We must also consider the impact on youth who are being targeted by the campaign. These children are highly vulnerable to frequent teasing and bullying at school, and as a result, are at increased risk for depression,



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anxiety, and low self-esteem because of bullying, all of which may impair their emotional well-being and physical health. Devastating stories of two girls who committed suicide have recently circulated in the media. Megan, a 13-year-old Missouri girl who struggled with her weight, experienced bullying on MySpace and was called "fat" and "slut" by someone posing as another person. Celina, an 11-year-old Florida girl, experienced bullying via text messages from classmates who jeered at her weight and race. The Strong4Life campaign may very likely add to the torment and harassment that children affected by obesity have to confront, often daily, at school.

Leadership from the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) and American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS), American Society of Bariatric Physicians (ASBP), Binge Eating Disorder Association (BEDA), Mental Health America (MHA), Mental Health American of Georgia (MHA Georgia), National Association for Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD), Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University would like to openly discuss our concerns with you and CHOA leadership in hopes of tailoring the "Strong4Life" campaign so that it can promote clear and specific actions for families to become healthier without stigmatizing or shaming them in the process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Nadglowski".

Joseph Nadglowski  
OAC President and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pamela R. Davis".

Pamela R. Davis, RN, CBN  
OAC Chairman of the Board

#### **National Organizations**

American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS)  
American Society of Bariatric Physicians (ASBP)  
Binge Eating Disorder Association (BEDA)  
Mental Health America (MHA)  
Mental Health America of Georgia (MHA Georgia)  
National Association for Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD)  
Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University