



March 9, 2021

Chair Mike Freiberg and Members  
Minnesota House Preventive Health Policy Division

Chair Freiberg and members of the committee:

We write in strong support for HF1721, a bill which includes tobacco tax changes and funding for tobacco use prevention and treatment.

On a recent day COVID-19 claimed 1,128 American lives. On that same day tobacco claimed 1,315 American lives. Our health care system nearly collapsed under the burden of large numbers of severely ill COVID-19 patients. But, it has not collapsed from the burden of tobacco-caused illness for a very simple reason. Our system is built to handle over 400,000 excess deaths from tobacco each year. Day in and day out, we seem to just accept that 400,000 Americans will die each year from tobacco's harms. This is unacceptable. It is time to address the tobacco problem with the same zeal that we have addressed the COVID-19 problem.

The US Congress and the Minnesota legislature have dedicated unprecedented resources to develop and implement prevention strategies including vaccinating most of the adult population. Billions are dedicated to helping us get through the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. Dedicating even a fraction of that amount of money to preventing the leading preventable cause of death and disease in this state and this nation could yield the same kind of human, health and economic benefit that we expect from our COVID-19 prevention strategies.

HF1721 is a giant step in that direction and one I encourage you to take.

The Association for Nonsmokers - MN, ANSR, has been in the forefront of every tobacco policy initiative since 1973. We know what tobacco prevention on a shoe string and funded by a garage sale looks like. Frankly, it is insufficient, even laughable. Except it isn't a laughing matter. It is a matter of health, equity, and economic benefit.

Please recognize and support the important work of protecting the public's health and approve HF1721.

  
Jeanne Weigum