



March 23, 2021

House Health Finance and Policy Committee

RE: HF2128 (Governor's budget proposal on funding prevention and treatment)

Dear Chair Liebling and Committee Members:

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation is a coalition of more than 60 organizations working to reduce youth tobacco use and end tobacco's harm for good. We are united behind policies that reduce youth smoking and nicotine addiction, including investing in tobacco prevention and treatment programs. **Our coalition supports HF 2128**, which invests \$8 million a year in tobacco prevention and treatment.

Investing in tobacco prevention and treatment is an important step to improve lung health, reverse the youth tobacco epidemic and encourage adults to quit. There is ample tobacco revenue collected by the state. Last year, Minnesota collected nearly \$760 million in tobacco revenue (\$607 million in taxes and \$152 million in settlement fees) and spent only 1 percent of that total on tobacco prevention and treatment.

Just last week, two major tobacco companies reached a settlement to pay Minnesota \$81 million in unpaid tobacco settlement fees by March 31, 2021. When the state receives these recouped settlement fees, the Governor's budget directs \$8 million a year to prevention and treatment. We support this proposal and prefer the language and funding levels included in Rep. Morrison's bills ([HF1410](#)/[HF569](#)), which would dedicate \$15 million a year to tobacco prevention and treatment.

The COVID-19 pandemic adds urgency to prevention efforts, since current and former smokers are at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19. To make matters worse, communities targeted by the tobacco industry, including Black and Indigenous Minnesotans, are some of the hardest hit by COVID-19. In late December, the Minnesota House Select Committee on Racial Justice made a number of policy recommendations to address racial disparities, including funding tobacco prevention and treatment at the CDC-recommended level.

For more than two decades ClearWay MinnesotaSM, the foundation created with 3 percent of the tobacco settlement, has provided the majority of funding for tobacco prevention in Minnesota. Minnesota's comprehensive investments in tobacco prevention and treatment have saved thousands of lives and billions of dollars. Over the past 20 years, tobacco control investments prevented 4,560 cancers, 31,691 hospitalizations for cardiovascular disease and diabetes, 12,881 respiratory disease hospitalizations and 4,118 deaths. \$5.1 billion was also saved in worker productivity and health care costs.

If Minnesota invests in tobacco control at the same or greater levels over the next 20 years, the state will prevent an additional 14,063 smoking-attributable deaths, reduce smoking-attributable medical spending by \$10.2 billion and increase paid and unpaid productivity by \$9.4 billion.

As ClearWay Minnesota prepares to sunset at the end of 2021, there is an urgent need to invest more in tobacco prevention and treatment, to continue our progress on reducing tobacco's harms. Last month, the Minnesota Department of Health released findings from the [2020 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey](#) that

show the youth e-cigarette epidemic continues. One in five Minnesota high-schoolers reported using e-cigarettes within the past 30 days, and 70 percent of youth e-cigarette users reported signs of dependence. While Minnesota has achieved historically low levels of youth smoking, e-cigarette use has wiped out decades of progress to reduce youth tobacco rates.

The state should continue investing in sustainable, proven strategies to reduce youth tobacco use and help smokers quit. Dedicating funds to prevention and treatment is a common-sense way to address rising youth tobacco use and declining state resources. This approach is popular among Minnesota residents. A 2020 poll found that 64 percent of Minnesotans support increasing state funding for youth tobacco prevention by \$15 million a year.

Minnesota is a stronger and healthier state when our kids grow up free from tobacco addiction, which is why Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation urges your support of prevention funding.

Sincerely,



Molly Moilanen
Co-Chair, Minnesotans for a
Smoke-Free Generation
Vice President, ClearWay MinnesotaSM



Janelle Waldock
Co-Chair, Minnesotans for a
Smoke-Free Generation
Senior Director of Policy, Blue Cross and Blue
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About Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation is a coalition of more than 60 organizations that share a common goal of saving Minnesota youth from a lifetime of addiction to tobacco. The coalition supports policies that reduce youth smoking and nicotine addiction, including increasing tobacco prices, raising the tobacco sale age to 21, limiting access to candy-, fruit- and menthol-flavored tobacco, and funding tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

Partners include: The African American Leadership Forum, Allina Health, Allina Health | Aetna, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association in Minnesota, Apple Tree Dental, Association for Nonsmokers – Minnesota, Aurora/St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation, Becker County Energized, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, A Breath of Hope Lung Foundation, Cancer Legal Care, CentraCare, Children’s Defense Fund-MN, Children’s Minnesota, ClearWay MinnesotaSM, Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio – CLUES, Dodge County Public Health, Education Minnesota, Essentia Health, Gillette Children’s Specialty Healthcare, A Healthier Southwest, HealthPartners, Hennepin Healthcare, Horizon Public Health, Indigenous Peoples Task Force, ISAIAH, JustUs Health, LAAMPP Alumni, Lake Region Healthcare, Local Public Health Association of Minnesota, LPCFC – Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative, March of Dimes, Mayo Clinic, Medica, Meeker McLeod Sibley Community Health Services, Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians, Minnesota Association of Community Health Centers, Minnesota Cancer Alliance, Minnesota Council of Health Plans, MHA – Minnesota Hospital Association, Minnesota Medical Association, Minnesota Nurses Association, Minnesota Oral Health Coalition, Minnesota Public Health Association, MNAAP – Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, ModelCities, NAMI Minnesota, North Memorial Health, NorthPoint Health & Wellness, Olmsted Medical Center, Open Cities Health Center, PartnerSHIP 4 Health, Perham Health & Living, Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, ShiftMN, St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, Steele County Public Health, Tobacco-Free Alliance, Twin Cities Medical Society, UCare, Vision In Living Life – Change is Possible, WellShare International and Zumbro Valley Medical Society. Find out more at: smokefreegenmn.org.