

April 27, 2020

House Ways and Means Committee



RE: HF 331 (Tobacco 21)

Dear Chair Carlson and Committee Members:

We write on behalf of Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation, a coalition of more than 60 Minnesota organizations that share a common goal of saving youth from a lifetime of tobacco addiction. **Our coalition supports HF331**, which raises the state tobacco sale age from 18 to 21 – commonly known as Tobacco 21.

As you may know, in late December, President Trump signed Tobacco 21 into federal law. The FDA directed retailers nationwide to immediately implement Tobacco 21. Action is still needed in Minnesota since enforcement of tobacco age laws happens at the federal, state and local levels.

In Minnesota and in other states, the discordance between the state and federal tobacco ages has confused retailers. Some stores have said they will continue to sell to young people under 21 until the state adopts Tobacco 21. Minnesota law enforcement officers have reiterated this point, emphasizing they only enforce local and state laws. **Adopting a strong statewide Tobacco 21 policy would provide clarity to retailers and law enforcement, while ensuring Minnesota maximizes the health benefits of this lifesaving policy.**

The Minnesota Tobacco 21 bill (HF331/SF463) aligns the state tobacco age with federal law and ensures strong implementation, compliance and enforcement. Specifically, this bill:

- **Provides clarity to retailers and law enforcement;**
- **Updates state tobacco definitions** to include the latest products on the market;
- **Updates state compliance check requirements** to include 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds; and
- **Updates state penalties** to follow current best practices and align with federal law.

Tobacco 21 is an important part of a comprehensive approach to reverse the youth nicotine epidemic. Raising the tobacco age to 21 will help keep tobacco products out of schools, prevent youth tobacco use and save lives.

Adopting Tobacco 21 is hugely popular and has gained the support of local law enforcement, educators, youth and Chambers of Commerce in Duluth, Minneapolis and St. Paul. **To date, more than 70 Minnesota communities have adopted Tobacco 21 and a recent poll found 74 percent of Minnesota residents support adopting Tobacco 21 statewide.**

Minnesota can – and must – do more to keep lungs healthy. It's especially important to reduce youth tobacco use considering the additional risks associated with smoking, lung damage and COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic occurs while the nation is experiencing what the U.S. Surgeon General calls an epidemic of youth e-cigarette use.

While youth cigarette smoking is at historic lows, **rising e-cigarette rates have erased decades of progress to reduce youth tobacco use.**

The 2019 Minnesota Student Survey found that 26 percent of Minnesota 11th-graders reported using an e-cigarette in the past month. Eleven percent of 8th-graders said they use e-cigarettes, which is nearly double the 2016 rate.

Tobacco 21 makes a difference because nearly 95 percent of addicted adult smokers start before age 21. The policy also keeps products out of schools since there are few 21-year-olds in our high schools.

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 you adopt a strong Tobacco 21 bill (HF331).

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, ISAIHA, JustUs Health, LAAMPP Alumni, Lake Region Healthcare, Local Public Health Association of Minnesota, LPCFC – Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative, March of Dimes, Masonic Cancer Center - University of Minnesota, 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, Minnesota Dental Association, 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.