

March 9, 2021

Minnesota House Preventive Health Policy Division

Dear Chair Freiberg and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Minneapolis Health Department, I urge you to **support HF1721**, which includes comprehensive tobacco tax changes and funding for prevention and treatment. A tobacco price increase is overdue in Minnesota and would be a major win for health and Minnesota kids. Furthermore, we support ending the tax break on premium cigars, tax e-cigarette devices as tobacco products and conform to federal e-cigarette online sales rules to help our state keep pace with the ever-evolving tobacco industry.

As a City, we have been leaders in passing local ordinances to reduce access to commercial tobacco products for youth. Minneapolis has enacted a range of local policies from reducing access to flavored tobacco products including banning the sale of certain tobacco products. We know that these local changes are not enough and therefore support the additional policies in this bill.

We are excited to see that this legislation may result in allocating more funds to tobacco prevention and treatment. This a wrap-around approach is critical to addressing Minnesota's stalled adult smoking rates and youth tobacco epidemic. The 2020 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey found one in five high-schoolers used e-cigarettes within the past 30 days, and 70 percent of youth e-cigarette users reported signs of dependence. Moreover, we have relied on Clearway Minnesota which has provided the majority of funding for tobacco prevention in our state. ClearWay Minnesota will sunset at the end of 2021, leaving a gap in prevention resources. Last year, Minnesota took in nearly \$760 million in tobacco revenue and spent only 1 percent of that total on commercial tobacco prevention and treatment.

As we work to mitigate and prevent the COVID-19 pandemic, we see the connection between smoking and higher risk for severe illness from the virus. We are also concerned that communities targeted by the tobacco industry, including Black and Indigenous Minnesotans, are some of the hardest hit by COVID-19. The components of this bill will make a difference at the local level. Thank you for considering this important legislation and we hope that it is enacted.

Sincerely,



Gretchen Musicant
Health Commissioner