



March 7, 2019

Minnesota House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Division

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RE: HF 331 / SF 463 – Raising the Tobacco Age to 21

Dear Chair Lesch 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 Minnesota youth from a lifetime of tobacco addiction. We support policies that will reduce youth smoking and end tobacco's harm for good. Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation enthusiastically supports **HF 331**, which will raise the tobacco sale age to 21 in Minnesota. Tobacco 21 will prevent youth tobacco use and save lives.

The vast majority of addicted smokers start at very young ages. About 95 percent of adult smokers begin before age 21. The tobacco industry knows this, which is why they target youth and young adults. We can do more to stop young people from smoking before they reach that age.

Immediate action is needed to prevent nicotine addiction among youth. For the first time in 17 years, youth tobacco use has risen in Minnesota. This frightening trend is driven largely by a sharp rise in e-cigarette use. The U.S. Surgeon General now calls youth nicotine addiction a national epidemic. Nicotine – which is contained in nearly every e-cigarette – harms the adolescent brain and may prime young brains for addiction. Today's e-cigarettes can deliver very high levels of nicotine, but youth often don't know they contain nicotine at all.

Tobacco 21 would help combat youth tobacco use by making it harder for youth to get tobacco products from friends and classmates. Most kids get cigarettes and tobacco products from older friends. Raising the tobacco sale age to 21 will help get tobacco products out of high schools, where there are plenty of 18-year-olds but no 21-year-olds. The National Academy of Medicine estimates that if the tobacco age was raised to 21, there would be a 25 percent reduction in smoking initiation among 15-to-17-year-olds.

Tobacco 21 is a growing movement to counteract the tremendous pressure of the tobacco industry and prevent youth addiction. For decades, the tobacco industry has aggressively marketed to youth and young adults to recruit replacement smokers and guarantee profits. In Minnesota alone, tobacco

companies spend more than \$100 million a year marketing their deadly products and keeping smokers addicted. That figure does not even include prolific e-cigarette ads, which were seen by 88 percent of Minnesota high-school and middle-school students in 2017.

The targeting of our youth by tobacco industry is one reason why our coalition believes that increasing the tobacco sales age should not be about punishing our kids. Rather, it should be about protecting them from a lifetime of addiction. That is why this bill removes penalties for youth purchase, use and possession of tobacco products (often called PUP). These penalties have not been proven to reduce youth tobacco use and may increase negative interactions between young people and law enforcement at a time when Minnesota is trying to build bridges across communities. This bill also increases administrative penalties on tobacco license holders that sell to underage youth. These fines haven't increased since this law was enacted in 1997. These increases will bring Minnesota's fines in line with other Tobacco 21 states and can be used by local governments to support compliance and enforcement.

The increase in e-cigarette use and youth tobacco use overall has disrupted Minnesota's longstanding efforts to reduce youth tobacco addiction. By passing Tobacco 21, Minnesota can join the growing number of leading states and communities putting young people above tobacco industry profits. Seven states and more than 400 localities – including 23 cities and counties in Minnesota – have raised the tobacco age. It's time for this lifesaving movement to go statewide.

Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation urges the committee to support this bill and stand up for Minnesota's youth and our future.

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
Vice President of Community Health and Health
Equity, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

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: A Healthier Southwest, African American Leadership Forum, Allina Health, 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 Corporation, Becker County Energize, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, CentraCare Health, Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota, Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota, ClearWay MinnesotaSM, Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio – CLUES, Dodge County Public Health, Essentia Health, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare, HealthEast, HealthPartners, Hennepin Healthcare, Hope Dental Clinic, Horizon Public Health, Indigenous Peoples Task Force, ISAIAH, JustUs Health, LAAMPP Alumni, Lake Region Healthcare, Lincoln Park Children and Families Collaborative, Local Public Health Association of Minnesota, March of Dimes, Mayo Clinic, Medica, Meeker McLeod Sibley Community Health Services, Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians, Minnesota Cancer Alliance, Minnesota Council of Health Plans, Minnesota Hospital Association, Minnesota Medical Association, Minnesota Nurses Association, Minnesota Oral Health Coalition, Minnesota Public Health Association, MN Association of Community Health Centers, MN Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, Model Cities of St. Paul, Inc., NAMI Minnesota, North Memorial Health Care, NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center, Olmsted Medical Center, PartnerSHIP 4 Health, Perham Health, Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation, SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, Shift MN, 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 www.smokefreegenmn.org.