



March 10, 2021

Minnesota House Preventive Health Policy Division

Dear Chair Freiberg and Committee Members:

We represent Minnesotans for a Smoke-Free Generation, a coalition of more than 60 organizations that share a common goal of reducing youth smoking and ending tobacco's harm for good. We are writing to 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, now is the time to end 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.

Raising commercial tobacco prices helps prevent young people from using tobacco products, helps smokers quit and saves lives. The youth tobacco epidemic has erased decades of progress to reduce youth tobacco use. Price is a powerful tool, since research finds that young people are two to three times more responsive than adults to tobacco price increases. Every 10 percent increase in cigarette prices reduces youth smoking by more than 5 percent and youth initiation by 10 percent.

Investing more funds in tobacco prevention and treatment ensures Minnesota is taking a wrap-around approach to stopping commercial tobacco's harms. Higher tobacco prices – coupled with dedicated funding – are urgently needed to address 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.

Minnesota needs a comprehensive, all-hands-on-deck approach to protect the next generation from lifelong tobacco addiction – including high prices and dedicated prevention funding. 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. 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.

The COVID-19 pandemic accentuates the need for strong tobacco prevention and treatment programs. 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.

Increasing tobacco taxes is a triple win for Minnesota because it will raise revenue while reducing health care costs and improving health. The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network and Campaign for Tobacco-

Free Kids estimate that a \$1.50 per pack increase would lead to major health gains, including 13,200 fewer kids becoming adult smokers, 24,300 adult smokers quitting and \$800 million in long-term health savings.

In closing, the majority of Minnesotans support increasing tobacco prevention funding and tobacco tax. A 2020 poll found 62 percent of Minnesotans favor increasing tobacco taxes and dedicating that revenue to funding prevention efforts. And 64 percent of Minnesota residents support increasing state funding for youth tobacco prevention by \$15 million a year.

Once again, we encourage you to adopt this lifesaving bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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



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Co-Chair, Minnesotans for a
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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, ending the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products, and funding tobacco prevention and treatment 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, 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, Minnesota Society for Public Health Education, 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.