



April 7, 2021

House Health Finance and Policy Committee

RE: HF 2128 (Health Finance Omnibus Bill)

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. **Our coalition enthusiastically supports the new tobacco tax dedication included in the omnibus tax bill (HF572, Morrison). We appreciate your collaboration with the Taxes Committee to include this critical investment in tobacco prevention and treatment.**

The Health Policy and Finance Committee devoted significant time this legislative session to exploring options for how to invest in tobacco prevention. Representative Morrison's bills (HF572, HF1410 and HF569) provided three different funding approaches – dedicating cigarette taxes, settlement fees or general funds. Dedicating \$15 million annually of existing cigarette tax revenues – as included in the omnibus tax bill – will save lives and reduce youth addiction.

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. Just last week, two tobacco companies paid Minnesota \$81 million in settlement back payments – and those companies will pay at least \$10 million a year going forward. Those payments are on top of the nearly \$760 million Minnesota collected last year in tobacco revenue (\$607 million in taxes and \$152 million in settlement fees). Minnesota spent only one percent of that total on tobacco prevention and treatment.

The state should continue investing in sustainable, proven strategies to reduce youth tobacco use and help smokers quit. Dedicating \$15 million of cigarette tax revenue 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 should continue our prevention and treatment investments until Big Tobacco no longer targets and harms Black, Indigenous and LGBTQ residents. And we should carry on these efforts until the industry no longer views our kids as “replacement smokers.” As these programs continue to save dollars and lives, we hope that in the future the Legislature will revisit the sunset provision in this bill.

Minnesota is a stronger and healthier state when our kids grow up free from tobacco addiction. Thank you for your partnership.

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 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: 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.