



# State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

**REPRESENTATIVE FAITH McMAHON**  
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**VICE CHAIR**  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN

**MEMBER**  
BANKS COMMITTEE  
HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE  
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Public Hearing Testimony  
Judiciary Committee  
March 13, 2006

Senator A. McDonald, Representative M. Lawlor, Members of the Judiciary Committee:

## **HB 5653**

I am here today to testify in favor of House Bill 5653 An Act to Prohibiting the Possession of Tobacco by Minors. My original intention in raising this bill was to close a loophole in our current laws. Currently it is illegal for minors to purchase cigarettes and for vendors to sell cigarettes to minors in the state of Connecticut. However, it has been shown that it is actually quite easy for minors to obtain cigarettes regardless of the law. Other states have taken stronger measures and passed legislation to make the possession of tobacco by minors illegal. The intention of this bill is not to punish either the minor or the parent, but instead to reinforce for Connecticut's youth the dangers of smoking and its various legal and health consequences.

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Over 400,000 individuals die from smoking related sicknesses each year. Numerous reports and studies have shown that cigarettes are a highly addictive drug. Teenagers are particularly at risk to develop a smoking habit. According to the Foundation for a Smoke-Free America, 60% of smokers start by the age of 14, and 90% of smokers are firmly addicted before reaching age 19. Only one in ten smokers become addicted after the age of 19. The shocking conclusion is that almost no one starts smoking after age 19. Even more troubling, the trend of youth smoking is on the rise. Between 1988 and 1998 the teen smoking rate rose by 73%. One of the factors that contribute to teenage smoking is the perception that tobacco use is normative. If teenagers witness their peers smoking, they are more likely to start smoking as well. Therefore possession of tobacco is

obviously leads to tobacco addiction as much, if not more, as the ability to purchase cigarettes.

Smoking is without a doubt a problem among the youth community, and all the more tragic because it can be prevented. Our current laws are not enough to stop the onset of teenage smoking and ensure that tobacco products are out of reach of minors. A study conducted by the CDC in 1996 found that over 60% of teen smokers bought their own cigarettes. It is our job as legislators to send a message to teens that smoking is an incredibly harmful habit. We need to strengthen our anti-smoking message by demonstrating to minors that obtaining and smoking cigarettes is leading them down a path towards addiction and certain sickness.

Some groups and individuals have come out against this bill arguing that it is targeting specific groups and calls for harsh fines. Again, this bill is not intended to punish minors. If passed, this bill will be an added measure of prevention against youth smoking. I am willing to work with the opposition to instead impose community service for minors caught with tobacco. For example, the community service court in Hartford could be an important part in the adjudication process. I am more than willing to collaborate to improve the penalties imposed by this bill. By passing this bill out of committee, Connecticut will be one step closer towards joining other states that have made this issue a top priority.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Faith".

Faith McMahon