



**Public Health Committee
March 12, 2008
American Cancer Society Testimony**

SB 621 – An Act Concerning a Reduction in Smoking Rates

The American Cancer Society estimates 2,720 Connecticut residents will be inflicted with lung cancer in 2008, and sadly, lung cancer still accounts for the most cancer related deaths in the US each year. The annual national death toll from tobacco related causes is estimated at 438,000.

More people die of lung cancer than of colon, breast, and prostate cancers combined.

In the U.S., smoking causes more than \$167 billion in annual health related economic costs, including medical costs and lost productivity. Each pack of cigarettes sold costs our society \$3.45 in medical care due to smoking and \$3.73 in productivity losses for a total of \$7.18 per pack. Smoking related diseases remain the most preventable cause of death and quite simply the best method for prevention at this time is for smokers to stop now.

The US Surgeon General has stated, "Smoking cessation represents the single most important step that smokers can take to enhance the length and quality of their lives." Quitting smoking is not easy, but it can be done. To have the best chance of quitting successfully, smokers need to know what they're up against, what there options are, and where to go for help.

Connecticut's "Quitline," is a useful tool in the cessation fight. This free service links callers with trained counselors who help plan a quit method that fits each person's unique pattern of tobacco use. With guidance from a counselor, quitters can avoid common mistakes that may hurt a quit attempt. Telephone counseling is also more convenient for many people. It doesn't require transportation or childcare and it's available nights and weekends.

In 2006, as part of the Comprehensive Cancer Plan, the legislature allocated \$1.46 million to the Tobacco QuitLine for expanded counseling and for the first time, offered Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) as well. Once NRT's were made available, the number of calls per month jumped from 80 to 8,000 calls in just 3 weeks and quickly exhausted the supply of NRT's. The Quitline continues to offer counseling services but is not funded beyond this fiscal year. Without quick action, the Quitline will likely cease operating by mid-summer.

Connecticut receives over \$400 million per year in tobacco settlement funds and the state tobacco tax. Yet despite that huge annual total, Connecticut ranks dead last in spending Master Settlement funds on the purpose for which it was intended—tobacco prevention and cessation services.

The recent Tobacco Free Kids report and the American Lung Association's annual state report card are an embarrassing wake up call and reveal that Connecticut is not doing nearly enough. The good news, however, is that it is fixable.

This legislative session has presented our policy makers with opportunities to make a difference in our fight against tobacco. The Governor, in her revised Budget and through HB 5020, has proposed permitting the Tobacco Trust Fund Board to allocate up to \$6 million per year to support prevention and cessation services. SB 459, which was heard earlier this month in this committee, would fund cancer prevention and early detection programs through the Comprehensive Cancer Plan administered by the Department of Health.

And finally, SB 261 would provide for funding of the Quitline for the next fiscal year, including offering NRT. The American Cancer Society supports SB 261 and we stand ready to work with the legislature to ensure Connecticut does all it can to help prevent people from starting smoking in the first place, help them quit if they do smoke and help those who didn't quit in time and now have cancer as a result.

Please support SB 261.

Thank you.