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TO: Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

FROM: Joni Czajkowski, Sr. Director, Government Relations & Advocacy

DATE: February 23, 2009

RE: Senate Bill 930, An Act Concerning the Cigarette Tax, the Tobacco Products Tax and the Alcoholic Beverage Tax

Good morning Senator Daily, Representative Staples and members of the committee. My name is Joni Czajkowski, Sr. Director, Government Relations & Advocacy with the American Heart Association. On behalf of the American Heart Association, I am here to offer our support of S.B. 930 specifically the sections pertaining to the tax increase on cigarettes and other tobacco products.

The American Heart Association is a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke with an impact goal to reduce coronary heart disease, stroke and risk by 25 percent by 2010. The AHA's 2009 Policy Goals for Connecticut include improving our state's Chain of Survival, improving the prevention and treatment of stroke, expanding access to affordable, quality healthcare, improving programs/policies to reduce obesity and to reduce overall tobacco use.

Tobacco use is a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke and contributes to approximately 430,000 deaths each year including 200,000 deaths from heart disease and stroke. Studies show that the inhalation of tobacco smoke causes blood vessels to contract, limits blood flow throughout the body, reduces a person's oxygen supply, damages arteries, lowers the "good" HDL cholesterol and increases the risk of clotting. In Connecticut, approximately 21 percent of high school students currently smoke, and 4,600 kids (youth under 18) become new daily smokers each year. Each year, tobacco use claims 4,700 adult lives due to their own smoking and costs the state \$1.63 billion in annual health care costs.

The American Heart Association would be hard pressed to achieve our mission to reduce cardiovascular disease unless policies to reduce tobacco consumption were implemented. The American Heart Association urges members of the committee to support S.B. 930. Increasing the price of tobacco products, specifically by raising tobacco taxes, is a proven method of preventing kids from starting to smoke and encouraging current smokers to quit or cut back. Higher taxes generate more state revenue and most importantly can save more lives in Connecticut. While the AHA supports SB 930, the AHA recommends increasing the current cigarette tax by one dollar bringing Connecticut to \$3.00. The AHA also urges members to

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dedicate a portion of the tax to smoking cessation coverage for Medicaid recipients and to the continuation of the Connecticut Quitline to help residents quit.

According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, projected benefits from increasing the state cigarette tax rate per pack by \$1.00 would result in \$51 million in the first year. Most importantly, youth smoking would decrease by 11.7% and 25,000 Connecticut youth would be kept from being addicted smokers. A \$1.00 increase would also result in a \$4.3 million 5-year health savings from fewer smoking-caused heart attacks and stroke.

The American Heart Association and our tobacco control partners remain steadfast in our pursuit to improve the health and well-being of the residents of our state. Increasing the tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products is a proven public health benefit. On behalf of the American Heart Association, I thank you for your time and consideration and ask for your support of S.B. 930.