



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES**  
*A Healthcare Service Agency*

DANNEL P. MALLOY  
GOVERNOR

PATRICIA A. REHMER, MSN  
COMMISSIONER

**Testimony by Patricia Rehmer, MSN, Commissioner**  
**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**  
**Before the Appropriations and Public Health Committees**  
**January 29, 2014**

**Testimony Supporting Tobacco and Health Trust Fund Board's**  
**2013 Disbursement Recommendations**

Good morning Sen. Bye, Sen. Gerratana, Rep. Johnson, Rep. Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Public Health Committees. I am Commissioner Patricia Rehmer of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and I am here this morning to speak in support of the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund Board's 2013 disbursement recommendations. I want to thank the Committees for your assistance in raising this proposal.

The Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services in conjunction with the Department of Revenue Services enforces the state laws that make it illegal to sell tobacco products to minors. To gauge compliance with these laws, we are required to conduct unannounced inspections of a random sample of tobacco vendors to assess the rate at which they sell to minors and report it to the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Since we began these inspections we have seen this rate plummet from approximately 70% in 1996 to a low of 9.7% in 2009. However, since then our rate has slowly crept up to 14.8% in 2013.

While we are still well below our federally mandated rate of 20%, it is important to note that Connecticut ties with Washington and Texas as the 12<sup>th</sup> worst state for violation of tobacco laws, and that 38 other states ranked above us, with the lowest rate being reported at 1.8%. Upon further examination, we identified outlet density and lack of sufficient resources as reasons for the increase in the non-compliance rate. We are currently unable to adequately inspect those cities and towns with the highest number of tobacco retail outlets that typically generate the highest number of violations. Funds from the Tobacco & Health Trust Fund will prevent tobacco sales to minors by allowing community agencies and local law enforcement personnel in urban areas to inspect all retailers, four times per year in accordance with best practices.

While the percentage of youth reporting "ever" and "current" use of tobacco products have significantly decreased between 2000 and 2011, there has been little change in where minors buy cigarettes, tobacco merchants asking for identification and tobacco merchants refusing to sell. Despite this, we still believe that our inspection efforts have helped control youth access and prevent smoking initiation because of the comprehensive strategies currently in place. These include: actively enforcing youth access laws in a consistent manner statewide; providing merchant education to all retailers in a variety of formats including an online training program recently launched; partnering with

the Department of Public Health to ensure that youth tobacco access strategies are part of the State's comprehensive tobacco control plan; utilizing community agencies to reward compliant retailers and warn non-compliant retailers about the law; and coordinating with the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) State enforcement contract to ensure efficient resource utilization for the enforcement of state and federal youth tobacco access laws.

In conclusion, we have made significant progress in enforcing youth tobacco access laws and in reducing the percentage of retailers who sell tobacco products to minors. However, we need to continue to develop and improve our tobacco retail inspection efforts locally so that our violation rates are at or below the national averages. Funds for tobacco retail inspections in urban areas will support our plans to implement comprehensive strategies to reduce youth access to tobacco products, with the ultimate goal of reducing youth tobacco use.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of these recommendations and I am willing to answer any questions you may have.