

**Testimony of Betsey Chadwick, Director, MCSAAC
concerning the Tobacco Health Trust Fund**

H.B. No. 6824 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2017, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR AND
OTHER PROVISIONS RELATED TO REVENUE.

Committee Hearing of March 6, 2015

Good Afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Representative Dillon, and Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am offering testimony in strong opposition to the transfer of all funds from the Tobacco Health Trust Fund (THTF) to the General Fund, leaving not one penny for the original purpose of the fund: to prevent tobacco use and to help current users stop using tobacco.

I am the director of the Middlesex County Substance Abuse Action Council (MCSAAC), located in Middletown and serving the 15 towns of our region. Tobacco remains a lethal addiction, costing the health care system billions of dollars. While cigarette use is down in Connecticut, youth are turning to flavored mini-cigars, flavored electronic “disposable hookahs” resembling mini-cigars, conventional hookahs, flavored e-cigarettes, and chewing tobacco that is packaged so well that even girls like it.

Tobacco remains part of many “addiction duos:” Drinking and smoking. Gambling and smoking. Even marijuana smoking with tobacco smoking. Last week at a local package store I stood next to a young man on leave from the army. He was purchasing beer, cigarettes, and chewing tobacco. I expect that by age 40 he’ll find it miserably hard to give up nicotine.

My organization is dedicated to substance abuse *prevention*. We enjoy working with youth. Keep a young person away from tobacco, alcohol and drugs until they’re 18 and the possibilities of addiction plummet. Keep them from these substances until they’re 25, and there’s a near 100% certainty that they will be tobacco-free and dependency-free for the rest of their lives.

And what a cost savings is!

We appreciate the dire financial straits that the Legislative Assembly finds itself in. All money should be spent with an eye to sound investment. *Tobacco programs are a sound investment*. They potentially yield billions in savings. Currently, our state Medicaid Program spends about \$500M in health care costs related to tobacco.

Almost 70% of smokers want to quit... we owe it to them to offer the resources to help them do it. The Connecticut Quitline is 100% funded through the Tobacco Health Trust Fund. As Big Tobacco finds ever-more creative ways to deliver nicotine, we must remain vigilant, especially when it comes to our youth.

Please do not allow the government to “sweep” all tobacco-reduction programming from the Tobacco Health Trust Fund.

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