



March 2, 2016

Public Health Committee

SB 290, AN ACT CONCERNING THE SALE AND PURCHASE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS AND SIGNAGE CONCERNING THE USE OF SUCH PRODUCTS AND SYSTEMS

My name is Judith Stonger and I am Vice President of Prevention, Wellness and Recovery at Wheeler Clinic. Wheeler provides a comprehensive continuum of mental health and substance abuse recovery, primary care, community justice, education, child welfare, early childhood and prevention and wellness services across Connecticut. In my role, I manage the statewide Tobacco Merchant Education Campaign administered by Wheeler with funding from the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. I am also a facilitator of the American Lung Association "Freedom From Smoking" tobacco cessation program and have first-hand knowledge of the devastation caused by use of tobacco products.

I am submitting this written testimony ***IN FAVOR OF*** Proposed SB 290, "***AN ACT CONCERNING THE SALE AND PURCHASE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS AND SIGNAGE CONCERNING THE USE OF SUCH PRODUCTS AND SYSTEMS***".

As a result of my professional experience and the data from numerous supporting research studies, I fully support raising the state minimum legal sale age for tobacco products to age 21. Doing so will not only have a substantial positive public health impact in our state but will also save lives.

According to a March 2015 report from the Institute of Medicine, raising the legal sale age to 21 will significantly reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who initiate tobacco use, result in improved health among this population, and reduce tobacco-caused deaths.

Data from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health in 2013 suggest that 95 percent of adult smokers begin tobacco use before age 21. This study also found that the age range from 18 to 21 is a time of transition to regular tobacco use with four out of five becoming regular daily smokers prior to age 21.

Likewise, those individuals who initiate tobacco use at younger ages are among the heaviest smokers at adults putting them at increased risk not only for cancer and heart disease, but also high blood pressure, asthma and reduced lung development.



We should learn from the positive public health impact of increasing the minimum sale age for alcohol from 18 to 21 in the 1980's. Data from Monitoring the Future show a substantial decrease in past month and high risk drinking as well as youth involved drinking driving fatalities among high school seniors between 1982 and 1998.

I respectfully request that you do all that you can to pass proposed SB 290 to increase the minimum legal sale age of tobacco products in Connecticut to 21. I further request that thoughtful deliberation be given to the definition of *vapor product* to ensure that this legislation does not unintentionally impede the use of medicinal and therapeutic devices, such as nebulizers, prescribed by health care professionals and administered in health care settings or by the patient as prescribed. Thank you.

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