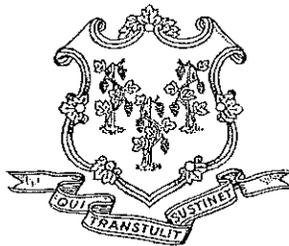


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Testimony of Senator Mae Flexer

In Support of Senate Bill 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*

Public Health Committee

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Mae Flexer, State Senator for the 29th District. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of **Senate Bill 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***. I want to thank the committee for raising this bill that addresses what I believe is a critically important issue. I'm here today with Bob Brex, Executive Director of the Northeast Communities Against Substance Abuse (NECASA), and I also serve on their Board of Directors.

Tobacco use causes some of the most prevalent and yet preventable health issues in the State of Connecticut. Cancer, chronic emphysema, asthma, and even type II diabetes are all caused by consumption of tobacco products. The Surgeon General reports that the number one cause of death in the United States and Connecticut is heart disease, and the leading cause of heart disease is smoking. The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) reports that an estimated 4,300 adults die each year from smoking, and that does not include individuals affected by second hand smoke.

DPH also estimates that Connecticut spends \$1.4 billion annually on smoking-related issues, including:

- \$640 million in hospital care;
- \$218 million in ambulatory care;
- \$214 million in nursing home care;
- and \$245 million for prescription drugs.

Of that \$1.4 billion, DPH estimates that Connecticut tax payers contribute over \$300 million. As Connecticut faces increasingly difficult budget challenges, it's clear we should be taking a hard look at ways to prevent smoking and drastically lower rates of usage.

According to DPH, nearly **90 percent** of adult smokers will start smoking at or before the age of **18**. Of that 90 percent, about half of those start using tobacco before age 16. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that more than one-third of those that start smoking before the age

of 18 will become regular, daily smokers before leaving high school. The same trends have also been found in those that use chew products and other tobacco products.

Research conducted by the CDC suggests that the number of children buying tobacco products from peers who are at least 18 years old doubled from 2001 to 2009, while the numbers of those buying directly from a store has been cut from 38.7 percent to 18.7 percent in the past decade—a reduction of more than 50 percent. It's clear then that children and students are now more likely to receive tobacco products from their older peers. By raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco products, we have the opportunity to effectively eliminate a major route utilized by young adults to obtain tobacco products.

Gaps in youth access restrictions are problematic because they undermine the potentially large health benefits of reduced youth usage. Research conducted by Dr. Tammy Tengs, a researcher and associate professor at the University of California, Irvine, suggests that the long-term population health benefits of decreasing youth smoking initiation are **seven** times greater than those resulting from comparable improvements in adult cessation. To be clear, this does not mean that cessation programs are neither beneficial nor crucial to improve public health, but it is widely known that avoiding smoking is easier than quitting. It can take an average of seven attempts before quitting is successful. If youth access to tobacco can be restricted, it will provide direct health benefits to those who will not initiate smoking, and allow cessation programs to better serve the individuals who need it most.

Raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco products will improve public health, ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and longevity of all Connecticut residents. Again, I thank the committee for raising this bill and for addressing this critical public health issue. Thank you very much for your consideration.