

Feb. 18, 2016

My name is Rebecca Theriaque. I am testifying in opposition to the current elimination of funding to the state's Tobacco & Health Trust Fund (THTF).

I hold many titles in my small eastern CT community. I am a Rotarian, I am a deacon of my church, soccer coach, musical director, Not to mention the Long list of charities I involve myself with. The most important title I have and the one I would fight to the death for is the title of Mother.

My son is what gives me purpose, strength and Drive.

The horrific truth is that my son does not know a world without Cancer. I was first diagnosed at the moment of his birth. His Grandmother however did know a world where cancer was not a concern and she lacked the knowledge needed to prevent her from becoming a smoker. Even as she held hands with her daughter thru surgery and treatments she was still a smoker, when he was three years old he caught a terrible bronchitis while visiting his mother in the hospital and was taken to see his pediatric doctor who told his mother and grandmother that the nicotine and poisons left on his grandmothers clothes and home could in fact be agitating his condition and that he should no longer visit with anyone who smokes tobacco. The look on his grandmother's face was complete guilt. She tossed away her pack of cigarettes as we left the hospital that day. She passed away 5 months after from Pancreatic Cancer. "MY" son has lost so much from Cancer that smoking is a repugnant thought for him. He learned that lesson in the hardest way possible. Here in Connecticut we have the minds and resources to teach our youth about these travesties. Sadly last week my son and I were at an event at a local high school and watched students smoking electronic cigarettes and real cigarettes right in front of their parents. Why are we not reaching these young adults? Why is it ok to have people in one of the wealthiest states in America not educated in the dangers of tobacco?

We know tobacco causes nearly 1/3 of cancers. This is not a fight to cure cancer with some large unknown medical miracle. This is a fight to educate and protect our children. We are letting these intelligent, exuberant, beautiful children by not providing them with adequate education about tobacco in all of its forms.

We know that educating our children works. States that fund tobacco control programs are seeing results. Maine for examples has reduced its youth smoking rates by two thirds between 1997-2013.

Connecticut is moving in the opposite direction: eliminating all funding for tobacco control programs in the 2016 and now 2017 budgets. This will have a disastrous effect. My son knows about the dangers of tobacco but many youth in Connecticut do not. With these programs cut, if we do not educate our children about the dangers; we should not be surprised when our youth become the next generation of smokers. Each year tobacco spends \$78.1 million dollars marketing their deadly product in Connecticut. Connecticut must protect our children, by equipping them with knowledge about the dangers.

We must continue to fund programs for to educate our kids on the dangers of tobacco. I urge you to please restore funding to the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund and tobacco control programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.