



**TESTIMONY OF
GRIFFIN HOSPITAL
BEFORE THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 20, 2018**

SB 164, An Act Raising The Legal Age To Purchase Tobacco To Twenty-One

**HB 5289, An Act Concerning The Department Of Public Health's
Recommendations Regarding Expanding The Clean Indoor Air Act**

Griffin Hospital appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 164, An Act Raising The Legal Age To Purchase Tobacco To Twenty-One, and HB 5289, An Act Concerning The Department Of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding Expanding The Clean Indoor Air Act.** Griffin Hospital supports these important bills.

SB 164 would raise the legal age to buy tobacco from 18 to 21. We know that the best way to reduce health-associated harm caused by smoking is for people to never start smoking in the first place. Failing that, delaying the start of smoking is a next best option.

According to a recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) study, 90% of people who had ever smoked on a daily basis first tried a cigarette before they were 19 years of age. The study concluded that if the minimum age of legal access to tobacco products was raised to 21 years, there would be approximately a 12% decrease in smoking prevalence by 2100. Based on the IOM's simulation model, approximately 223,000 fewer premature deaths would result, 50,000 fewer from lung cancer alone, and 4.2 million fewer years of life would be lost in the U.S. for those born between 2000 and 2019.

The IOM study cited national data that show that about 95 percent of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21, with about 80% of whom first try smoking before age 18. While less than half (47%) of adult smokers become regular, daily smokers before age 18, four out of five become regular, daily smokers before they turn 21. SB 164 would therefore directly impact those in the 18 to 21 age range, a time that the data show many smokers transition to regular use of cigarettes.

As a healthcare provider, Griffin Hospital has a moral, ethical, and medical obligation to support this bill. Griffin Hospital sees the devastating effect of smoking every day. Simply put, smoking is either the direct cause of, or a major contributor to, the majority of conditions that rob years of life and life from years. These conditions range from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and emphysema to lung cancer and most other cancers. Smoking is also a major factor in the exacerbation of heart disease and many other chronic diseases, such as congestive heart failure.

If passed into law, Connecticut would join other states and cities that have increased the age to purchase tobacco. Currently, an individual must be 21 to purchase tobacco in California, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, Oregon, New York City, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Portland (Maine), Albany (New York), and the two Kansas Cities (Missouri and Kansas).

HB 5289 would expand Connecticut's Clean Indoor Air Act by adding to the number workplaces and locations required to be smoke-free. Additionally, HB 5289 would eliminate several exemptions to the Clean Indoor Air Act passed in 2003. The Act has helped to educate the public on the dangers of smoking, and the associated negative impact of secondhand smoke.

The intent of HB 5289 is consistent with Griffin Hospital's efforts to clear the air in and around its buildings. In 2008, Griffin became one of the first hospitals in Connecticut to implement a smoke-free campus. The hospital also offers a series of smoking cessation programs for its employees and the public.

But Griffin realized that these measures alone were not enough to affect the tremendous toll smoking was taking on our community. In response to the alarming number of late stage lung cancers being diagnosed, Griffin Hospital also created a Low-Dose Lung Cancer Screening Program in 2013. The program followed screening criteria developed by the National Lung Screening Trial (NLST), identifying high-risk patients who would benefit from screening with the goal of detecting lung cancer at earlier stages when it is most treatable.

At the time the program was implemented, most insurance plans did not cover lung cancer screening for asymptomatic patients. Not wanting this to create a barrier to screening for those patients who were eligible, Griffin provided the low-dose CT scans for free. In the program's first year, a total of 194 high-risk patients were enrolled. By the second year, that number more than doubled, with 487 patients enrolled. Currently, there are a total of 926 patients in the program, most receiving annual follow up surveillance screening. Referrals into the program are continuing at a steady pace, and the screening is now covered by the majority of insurance plans.

But the most telling number is 22 -- that is the number of cancers detected (19 lung, 2 lymphoma, and 1 liver) through the program. Prior to the program's inception, the majority of lung cancer diagnoses in the community were found at stage 3 or 4, when the disease was

symptomatic, and when treatment options were often more aggressive, and more often less successful.

The program has literally reversed the curve of when lung cancers are diagnosed, with the majority of cancers identified through the program being either stage 1 or 2, when the cancer can be more successfully treated or even cured. That has made a tremendous difference for those 22 individuals diagnosed through the program.

However, this program and the best that medicine has to offer for the care and treatment of lung cancer and other smoking related diseases are still not enough to counter the scourge of smoking. The patients eligible for Griffin's program all had extensive 20-plus pack year histories of smoking (a pack year being defined as smoking a pack a day for a year). The answer, as noted at the outset of this testimony, is for people to never start smoking in the first place. The more people we can prevent from ever starting, or at least starting later in life, the less people will develop lung cancers in the first place, regardless of the stage of diagnosis.

For these reasons, Griffin Hospital urges the committee to pass the Department of Public Health's recommendations to expand the Clean Indoor Air Act and to increase the legal age to purchase tobacco to 21 to protect and enhance the health and well-being of Connecticut's residents and visitors.

Thank you for your consideration of Griffin Hospital's position. For additional information, contact Ken Roberts, Director of Communications and Public Affairs, at 203.732.7432 or kroberts@griffinhealth.org.