

Public Health Committee
Tuesday, March 20, 2018
Senate Bill 164 AA Raising the Legal Age to Purchase
Tobacco to Twenty-One

Leigh Pechillo, Heart Survivor and Volunteer
American Heart Association

I would like to thank the Public Health Committee leadership and members for providing me with the opportunity to comment in support of SB 164 AA Raising the Legal Age for Purchase and Use of Tobacco Products, on behalf of the American Heart Association.

As the daughter of a father who began smoking at 13-years-old and continued the habit for 50 years, I don't want any other family to endure what mine has as the result of tobacco. He tried to quit on several occasions during his lifetime, but the addictive nature of tobacco made it extremely difficult. His smoking caused him to have significant cardiovascular disease that eventually cost him his life at 70-years-old, and while I don't know whether the second hand smoke I inhaled for more than 20 years living in the same house contributed to my heart disease, I know that it certainly didn't help.

When you consider that the parts of the brain most responsible for decision making, impulse control, sensation seeking and susceptibility to peer pressure continue to develop and change through young adulthood and adolescent brains are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and nicotine addiction, it is no wonder that young smokers become lifetime smokers.

As the mother of two children, 14 and 11-years-old, I never want to see them or any of their friends have easy access to any tobacco products including e-cigarettes. Most teens who smoke and use tobacco report getting cigarettes and other products from their friends. Ninety percent of those who provide cigarettes to younger teens are under the age of 21. With 1,300 kids under the age of 18 becoming new daily smokers each year and 56,000 Connecticut kids now under the age of 18 who will eventually die from their own tobacco use, I would hope our legislature would put a greater value on our children and their futures.

At a time when our state and country are struggling to balance budgets and continue to fear the looming cost of healthcare, it is important to consider the price we are paying to care for those affected by tobacco related illnesses. In Connecticut alone, the annual health care costs directly caused by smoking are \$2.03 billion. Medicaid costs caused by smoking in Connecticut are \$520.8 million. By increasing the legal age to purchase tobacco products, we would see a significant change long-term in the health of our state and the health related expenses it is responsible for paying.

I respectfully request your support for this important bill not only for the health of our children, but the health of the future of our state.

Sincerely,
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