



Connecticut Department of Public Health

Testimony Presented Before the Public Health Committee

March 20, 2018

Commissioner Raul Pino, M.D., M.P.H.
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Senate Bill 164 - An Act Raising the Legal Age to Purchase Tobacco to Twenty-One

The Department of Public Health (DPH) supports the concept of raising the legal age for purchase and use of tobacco products because postponing tobacco use initiation promotes public health. The Department thanks the committee for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

Increasing the minimum age to purchase or possess tobacco products to 21 is an evidence-based strategy that complements those already in place to reduce youth tobacco use and help users quit. Nearly nine out of ten smokers start smoking by age 18, and 99% start by age 26.¹ Many smokers transition to regular, daily use between the ages of 18 and 21.² Smoking-related health problems are influenced by both the duration (years) and intensity (amount) of use. Individuals who start smoking at younger ages are more likely to smoke as adults, and they are also among the heaviest users.³

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports that “raising the tobacco sale age will significantly reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who start smoking; reduce smoking-caused deaths; and immediately improve the health of adolescents, young adults and young mothers who would be deterred from smoking as well as their children.”⁴

Adolescent brains are particularly vulnerable to nicotine and nicotine addiction. An earlier age of initiation is associated with greater levels of nicotine dependence and a greater intensity and persistence to continue to use tobacco into adulthood.⁵ Delaying the age of first

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Preventing Tobacco Use among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA, 2012.

² Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, *Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21*. Washington, D.C., 2015

³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Preventing Tobacco Use among Young People: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Office on Smoking and Health, 1994.

⁴ Institute of Medicine, *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*. The National Academies Press, Washington, DC, 2015.

http://www.iom.edu/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/tobacco_minimum_age_report_brief.pdf

⁵ Institute of Medicine, *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015,

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experimentation and initiation can reduce the risk that an adolescent transitions to becoming a regular or daily tobacco user and increases their chance of successfully quitting if they do become a regular user. Due to nicotine addiction, three out of four adolescent smokers continue to use into adulthood, even though they planned on quitting a few years after starting to smoke.⁶

Young adult smokers (18 to 21) serve as a social source of tobacco products for youth. A legal age of 21 will lessen the likelihood of adolescents receiving tobacco products from friends who can purchase them legally and can help keep tobacco out of Connecticut schools.⁷

Increasing the minimum age for the purchase of all tobacco products to the age of 21 will both reduce youth initiation of tobacco use and reduce tobacco-related health expenditures. Both are positive steps towards better tobacco control. Tobacco use cessation program participants have said many times, “the easiest way to quit is never to start”.

DPH recognizes that enactment of Senate Bill 164 would result in revenue loss that is not included in either the adopted budget or the Governor’s proposed midterm budget. Due to this fiscal impact, the passage of this bill would need to be considered in the larger context of the state’s budget and fiscal situation.

Thank you for your consideration of this information.

⁶ U.S. Health and Human Services, *Preventing Tobacco Use among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 2012.

⁷ Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, *Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21*. Washington, D.C., 2015

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