

15 March 2018

Public Health Committee

Senate Bill 164: AA Raising the Legal Age To Purchase Tobacco To Twenty-One

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. By passing this, Connecticut will join many cities, and a few states, who have passed similar sensible legislation.

Tobacco use causes so much harm in our society, harm that is avoidable. The best way to avoid it is to make it harder for kids to get addicted to tobacco. Below are some facts which starkly show the harm of tobacco use in Connecticut, both to people's lives and to the state's economy.

- 27% of cancer deaths in CT are attributable to smoking
- 4,900 CT adults die each year from their own smoking
- 56,000 CT kids, now under the age of 18, will eventually die from their own tobacco use
- Annual health care costs in CT directly caused by smoking are \$2.03B
- Medicaid costs caused by smoking in CT are \$520.8M
- CT residents' state and federal tax burden from smoking caused government expenditures is \$853 per household
- Smoking-caused productivity losses in CT are \$1.25B annually

Meanwhile, the current statistics on kids and tobacco in CT are:

- 10.3% of high school students smoke
- 7.2% of high school students use e-cigarettes
- 1,300 kids under the age of 18 become new daily smokers each year

I work at a university and know well that if this bill is passed, some kids who want to smoke still will, just like kids who want to drink before they are 21. But it is important that we make the harmful behavior more difficult and send a message that tobacco is harmful to health. Moreover, because 90% of those who provide cigarettes to younger teens are under the age of 21, this bill will have cascading benefits.

It is important to include e-cigarettes in this bill. For years, adolescent smoking rates have been coming down, although nearly one in five high school seniors still uses tobacco. Now, however, adolescents' use of e-cigarettes, nicotine vapor devices, hookahs, and small cigars has gone up dramatically, threatening to completely erase a decade of progress.

While the legislature will struggle with many complicated issues this session, this is not one of them. Raising the legal age to purchase tobacco to 21, including for e-cigarettes, will have far reaching benefits of preventing illness, saving lives, and helping our state's economy. Thank you very much for considering supporting this important bill.

Sincerely, Abigail Roth (Alder, Ward 7, New Haven)