



Testimony in Support of S.B. 164: An Act Raising the Legal Age to Purchase Tobacco to Twenty-One

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Public Health Committee
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Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Representative Steinberg, Representative Betts, and esteemed members of the Public Health Committee,

I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and smokeless tobacco carries serious health risks.¹ The young adult brain is particularly susceptible to addiction to nicotine and most smokers begin smoking before the age of 21.² In Connecticut, 31.3 percent of high school students report having tried tobacco (in any form) at least once and 14.3 percent report that they currently use tobacco products.³ The rate of trying tobacco is higher in grades 11 and 12;⁴ a plausible explanation for this finding may be that students have less access to tobacco themselves and through social contacts before the age of 18, when purchasing these products becomes legal.

A model comparing the impact of raising the smoking age to increasing cigarette taxes concluded that raising the smoking age to 21 would have an immediate impact on youth smoking rates and a lasting impact on both adult smoking and long-term health outcomes.⁵ In addition, models predicted that reductions in smoking would result in significant long-term cost-savings.⁶ A town-based effort to increase the legal age of tobacco to 21 in Massachusetts proved successful despite the mobility of the population and limited geographic reach of the policy.⁷

Overall, public health research supports increasing the legal age of tobacco purchase as an effective means to reduce adult smoking and improve population health in the long term. Enacting policy that promotes the health of Connecticut's youth is a powerful tool for ensuring that they have the opportunity to thrive and that Connecticut has a healthy future as a result.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 164. I can be reached with any questions at ksiegel@ctvoices.org or at 203-498-4240, ext. 120.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Fast Facts." Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/smokeless/health_effects/index.htm

² Winickoff, J., Hartman, L., Chen, M. et al. (2014). "Retail Impact of Raising Tobacco Sales Age to 21 Years." *American Journal of Public Health*. 104:11. doi: [10.2105/AJPH.2014.302174](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302174)

³ Connecticut Department of Public Health. (2016) "2015 Youth Tobacco Surveillance: Connecticut." Retrieved from: <http://www.portal.ct.gov/DPH/Health-Education-Management--Surveillance/Tobacco/Stats--Reports>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ahmad, S. and Billimek, J. (2007). "Limiting youth access to tobacco: Comparing the long-term health impacts of increasing cigarette excise taxes and raising the legal smoking age to 21 in the United States." *Health Policy*. 80:378-91. doi:10.1016/j.healthpol.2006.04.001

⁶ Ahmad, S. (2005). "The Cost-Effectiveness of Raising the Legal Smoking Age in California." *Medical Decision Making*. 25:3 Retrieved from: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0272989X05276859>

⁷ Kessel Schneider, S., Buka, S., Winickoff, J. and O'Donnell, L. (2016). "Community reductions in youth smoking after raising the minimum tobacco sales age to 21." *Tobacco Control*. 25:3. doi: [10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2014-052207](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2014-052207)