
Memo

To: House Human Services Committee

Date: March 12, 2014

Re: H.605 and H.616, bills regarding changing the purchasing age of tobacco products from 18 to 21

The Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont (CTFV), including the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association and the American Lung Association, supports tobacco prevention and control policies that have been proven to be effective.

According to the recently updated “Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control,” developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is “a robust evidence base for effective tobacco control interventions”. These interventions fit in three categories:

- Increasing the price of cigarettes and other tobacco products through higher taxes.
- Reducing exposure to secondhand through smoke-free policies.
- Fully funding comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

The 2012 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System shows that 20 percent of Vermonters between the ages of 18 and 24 smoke. Although higher than the general population of 17 percent, the 18 to 24 smoking rate **has dropped significantly from a high of 35% in 2001**. In addition, **the youth smoking rate has been cut in half**. These dramatic declines happened since Vermont began its comprehensive tobacco control program, based on the CDC Best Practices, in 2000.

Thanks to the CDC, the U.S. Surgeon General’s reports on smoking, and the expansive body of research across the country, we know what works. There is little evidence to date that increasing the legal age to purchase is an effective way to prevent and reduce smoking. Increasing the legal age to purchase tobacco products is relatively new and rare. No state has increased the legal age to 21 to date. Four states (Alabama, Alaska, New Jersey and Utah) and several New York state counties have increased the minimum purchase age to 19 years old. Needham, MA became the first city to implement a Tobacco 21 law and New York City’s law to raise the legal purchase age to 21 is effective on May 1, 2014. This law includes an evaluation component that will help other communities and states determine its effectiveness. NYC is also in a better place to consider this effort as it already has a much higher cigarette tax (\$4.35 per pack versus \$2.62 per pack in Vermont) and spending on tobacco control.

We encourage Vermont lawmakers to wait until the evidence is clear that raising the smoking age to 21 will reduce smoking prevalence and instead support measures proven to work -- like raising tobacco taxes which has been shown to be the most effective way to prevent kids from smoking. It’s a policy effort that is also overwhelmingly supported by Vermonters. 77% supported a \$1 increase in 2013.

Until the measurable evidence is clear, the CFTV does not believe that raising the age to purchase and use tobacco products to age 21 is advisable and could dilute the sustainable support for the tobacco control programs and policies we know are working.

Our 2014 legislative priorities remain to:

- Maintain adequate funding for Vermont's Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program.
- Increase and preserve the Tobacco Trust Fund, which will be zeroed out by the Governor's FY15 recommended budget – putting the tobacco control program at risk.
- Support effective tobacco tax policies that will reduce and prevent smoking.
- Close remaining loopholes in Vermont's smoke-free laws by passing H.217.

Thank you for your time and your work to prevent and reduce tobacco use in Vermont.