

March 4, 2015

To: Representative Kitty Toll, House Committee on Appropriations
From: Rebecca Ryan, American Lung Association in Vermont
Subject: Vermont Tobacco Evaluation Review Board and Tobacco Control Program Evaluation

In 2005, I was appointed by then Speaker of the House Gaye Symington to serve on the Vermont Tobacco Evaluation and Review Board (VTERB) to represent the “Non-profit Anti-tobacco Organizations.” From 2006-2008, I was the VTERB Administrator. Since returning to the American Lung Association in 2008, I regularly attend the monthly VTERB meetings and serve on its Enforcement and Community and Schools Program Committees. I mention all this as I have a unique perspective of VTERB and its role in the state’s comprehensive tobacco control program. Below are what I believe to be the policy and programmatic reasons for maintaining VTERB as an independent board and the independent evaluation, and investing in both:

- 1) **As an independent board, VTERB guides the state’s tobacco control program and policies based on research and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) best practices and not politics.** The idea of creating an independent board came from the original CDC best practice recommendations in 1999. If VTERB were made an advisory board to the Commissioner of Health, program and policy decisions would likely be influenced by the Administration at that time. In 2003, the Governor proposed cutting the program funding by over 40%; VTERB strongly opposed it. As a result, a small group of lawmakers in the House and the Senate worked to restore it. The outcome would likely have been different if VTERB had served as an advisory group.
- 2) **VTERB works with the independent evaluator (RTI International) to keep the tobacco control program on course and consistent with the science and CDC best practices, ensuring a return on investment.** For example, based on RTI’s recommendation, the program is now strategically focusing a large portion of its health communication efforts on individuals with low socioeconomic status who smoke at a higher rate than the general population. In addition, when the CDC updated *Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control* in 2014, VTERB recommended department/agency funding and program components align with the new CDC guidance. This recommendation resulted in a shift of funds from the Agency of Education to the health department. This decision was based on best practices and most effective use of limited funding.
- 3) **VTERB provides technical assistance and policy recommendations to lawmakers.** VTERB helps to craft language, and provides expertise on tobacco-related legislation. Jan Carney, MD, MPH, former Vermont Commissioner of Health wrote in her book, *Public Health in Action: Practicing in the Real World*, “[VTERB’s] most important function was the independent review and recommendation for the annual program budget to the governor, joint fiscal committee of the legislature, and the House and Senate appropriations committees each year by October 1, well in advance of the governor’s January budget address and the legislative deliberations that occurred during the winter.”

- 4) **VTERB serves as a catalyst to increase coordination across the components of the tobacco control program and enhance the collaboration among the Departments of Health and Liquor Control and the Agency of Education.** For example, the board, in collaboration with the health department, develops an annual plan. This plan aligns the work of the Department of Liquor Control (youth access enforcement) and the Agency of Education (prevention) and the Department of Health (tobacco cessation, health communication, community coalitions, and youth groups).

In summary, the role of VTERB in the comprehensive tobacco control program is as important as the health communications and cessation activities handled by the health department because it independently ensures results-based accountability across state entities and program activities.

Please let me know if you need further information. Thank you.