

Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21

Written Testimony for Multnomah County Board of County Commissioners

Tuesday, September 13, 2016

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As a resident of Multnomah County, parent of two young children, tobacco control researcher, and volunteer with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, I submit this testimony in strong support of increasing the minimum tobacco sales age to 21. A growing body of research indicates that increasing the minimum tobacco sales age would result in a substantial public health benefit, especially among high school youth aged 15 to 17. Many local and several state jurisdictions have taken the important step of implementing Tobacco 21, and early results have been promising. I urge the Multnomah County Board of County Commissioners to consider the following evidence in their decision:

- The U.S. Surgeon General has warned that nicotine may have lasting negative effects on the developing brain of adolescents and young adults.¹ Young people feel addicted to nicotine earlier than adults do. Three out of every four teen smokers end up smoking in adulthood.²
- More than 80% of adult smokers first try smoking before they turn 18, and 95% of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21.³ The American Academy of Pediatrics identifies tobacco use as one of the most important pediatric health threats and recommends raising the minimum tobacco sales age to reduce youth tobacco use.⁴
- As teens enter high school, tobacco becomes easier to obtain from social sources, both from older peers who can purchase tobacco legally and those who make successful illicit sales. In Multnomah County, only 9.6% of 8th graders report tobacco use in the past 30 days compared to 21.4% of 11th graders.⁵ Research suggests that increasing the purchase age of tobacco to 21 would mean that those who can legally purchase tobacco are less likely to be members of high school social networks, thus limiting minors' access to tobacco.⁶
- When people smoke for longer periods of time, they are more likely to smoke heavily. Smokers who have smoked for a long time, for example because they started at a young age, and those who have smoked heavily are more likely to develop tobacco-related disease such as high blood pressure, asthma, cancer, and heart disease.⁷
- A landmark 2015 report from the Institute of Medicine found that raising the tobacco minimum legal sale age to 21 would have dramatic public health benefits across the population.⁸ The Institute found that such an action would reduce overall smoking prevalence by 12% and smoking-related deaths by nearly 10%. Health benefits would particularly accrue to adolescents aged 15 to 17 years, who are most at-risk for initiating tobacco use.
- The Institute found that additional health benefits would include fewer premature births due to maternal and paternal smoking during pregnancy, which can have severe health implications for

¹ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21. Available at: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0376.pdf>. Accessed September 12, 2016.

² Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21. Available at: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0376.pdf>. Accessed September 12, 2016.

³ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21. Available at: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0376.pdf>. Accessed September 12, 2016.

⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. Policy Statement: Public Policy to Protect Children from Tobacco, Nicotine, and Tobacco Smoke. October 2015. Available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2015/10/21/peds.2015-3109.full.pdf+html>. <https://multco.us/file/55238/download>

⁵ Institute of Medicine. Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products. March 2015. Available at: <http://nationalacademies.org/HMD/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>. Accessed September 12, 2016.

⁶ <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0376.pdf>

⁷ Institute of Medicine. Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products. March 2015. Available at: <http://nationalacademies.org/HMD/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>. Accessed September 12, 2016.

infants and accompanying high medical costs. Raising the minimum legal sale age would also decrease secondhand smoke exposure among youth and the rate of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) cases among mothers aged 15 to 49 years, as secondhand smoke exposure is a primary cause of SIDS.

- Other towns and states have successfully raised the tobacco purchase age to 21. Needham, Massachusetts was one of the first towns to raise the age in 2005. Over the next six-year period, current smoking dropped by half among Needham high school students (13% to 7%), significantly more than in the surrounding suburbs (15% to 12%).⁹ The decline in tobacco use was consistent across all ages, genders, and racial/ethnic groups, indicating benefit from a health disparities perspective.
- The states of Hawaii and California and at least 185 localities across 14 states – including New York City and St. Louis County – have increased the minimum legal sale age to 21.¹⁰ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that three-quarters of Americans support raising the minimum legal sale age to 21, including nearly seven in ten current smokers.¹¹
- According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, raising the tobacco age of purchase to 21 “is one more part of a comprehensive tobacco control effort that offers several benefits that could help reduce youth tobacco use and increase the likelihood that youth will grow up tobacco-free.” These benefits include delaying the age of onset and regular use, keeping tobacco out of schools, making it easier to enforce sales bans to young adolescents, and simplifying enforcement by making the age of enforcement the same for alcohol and tobacco.¹² In states such as Oregon, where the legal purchase age for both marijuana and alcohol is 21 and tobacco access laws are currently poorly enforced, raising the tobacco purchase age to 21 may further streamline law enforcement efforts.

Tobacco continues to be the leading cause of death nationally and in Oregon. The persistent health threat necessitates strong regulatory action, including evidence-based policies such as increasing the minimum legal purchase age to 21. Despite opposition from industry-funded groups, success stories and positive implications from jurisdictions that have adopted Tobacco 21 laws are multiplying. As the mayor of Columbia, Missouri has stated, “Any tax revenue lost would be a great investment in Columbia’s future.”¹³

I urge the Multnomah County Board of County Commissioners to increase the minimum tobacco legal sales age to 21 as an investment in our youth’s health and that of future generations.

⁹ Kessel Schneider S, Buka SL, Dash K, Winickoff JP, O’Donnell L. Community Reductions in Youth Smoking After Raising the Minimum Tobacco Sales Age to 21. *Tobacco Control*. 2016;25(3):355-9.

¹⁰ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. States and Localities That Have Raised the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21. Available at: http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/content/what_we_do/state_local_issues/sales_21/states_localities_MLSA_21.pdf. Accessed September 12, 2016.

¹¹ King BA, Jama AO, Marynak KL, Promoff GR. Attitudes Toward Raising the Minimum Age of Sale for Tobacco Among U.S. Adults. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2015;49(4):583-8.

¹² Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21. Available at: <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0376.pdf>. Accessed September 12, 2016.

¹³ Success Stories. Tobacco Twenty-One. Available at: <http://tobacco21.org/success-stories/>. Accessed September 12, 2016.