



Testimony in Support of HB 2870 A

April 29, 2013

Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

Shari Malstrom, RN

Chair Burdick and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in support of HB 2870 A. My name is Sheri Malstrom. I have been a public health nurse specializing in child and maternal health for the past 28 years. HB 2870 A would remove the prohibition against imposition of taxes by counties on cigarettes and tobacco products, and require at least 40 percent of any revenue raised to be allocated to public health.

The Oregon Nurses Association is Oregon's oldest and largest nursing union and professional association, and is proud to represent over 13,000 registered nurses, advanced practice nurses, and nursing students in Oregon. ONA supports policies that focus on prevention of chronic disease and promote wellness.

From emergency rooms, to schools, to clinics, to public health departments, nurses work with patients to prevent them from smoking, and to help those who already use tobacco access the resources they need to quit. Tobacco use is widely known to cause heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and cancer, and those who use tobacco often face a lifetime of health consequences. The nurses I work with in Multnomah County provide care to some of our most vulnerable residents. We help take care of pregnant women, new mothers, infants and children. Frequently, the people we care for have nowhere else to turn. They are more likely to be smokers or exposed to second-hand smoke. When parents smoke around their children, their children become addicted to nicotine at an early age and are more likely to take up smoking as a teenager, or even sooner.

The most effective way to ensure someone does not smoke or use tobacco is to prevent them from starting. Nine out of ten smokers begin smoking before the age of 18, and the younger a person is when they begin smoking, the greater his or her chances are of ultimately becoming a lifelong tobacco user. This makes prevention especially important for Oregon's youth. Research shows that smoking at an early age increases the risk of developing lung cancer or experiencing other chronic health problems in adulthood due to nicotine addiction.ⁱ

Increasing the price of cigarettes and tobacco products can be a significant deterrent for youth—who are often most sensitive to price—to start smoking, increasing the odds that they will stay smoke-free. Under HB 2870 A, 40 percent of the revenue raised by a county tobacco tax will go to help fund vital public health services such as tobacco prevention and cessation programs, or mental health services. These services can further assist in preventing youth from taking up smoking. Counties around the state are struggling to fund public health and other services, and allowing them to raise revenue, while simultaneously limiting youth access to a harmful product is a win-win.

As a public health nurse, I strongly encourage you to support the passage of House Bill 2870 A.

ⁱ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids Factsheet, *The Path to Smoking Addiction Starts at Very Young Ages*,
<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0127.pdf>.