



## Testimony in Support of HB 2275

March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013

House Revenue Committee

Teri Mills MS, RN, CNE

Chairman Barnhart and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in support of HB 2275, legislation to increase Oregon's cigarette tax. My name is Teri Mills. I am a longtime nurse educator and serve as a member of Oregon Nurses Association's Cabinet on Health Policy.

In your consideration of HB 2275, I hope that many of you had the opportunity to watch the CNN special, *Escape Fire: The Fight to Rescue American Healthcare*, a documentary on America's health care crisis that aired this past Sunday. The very first healthcare provider featured was a primary care physician from The Dalles, Oregon on her last day of practice in a community-based clinic where she worked. Why was she leaving? As you know our healthcare system is based on profit, and the number of patients each provider sees is critically important to making money. Unfortunately, the vast majority of patients who visit their provider have chronic preventable, time consuming, and expensive conditions. What is the biggest risk factor to their development? Tobacco use! Smoking!

Tobacco use is widely known to cause heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and cancer. Despite the commitment of every nurse and health care provider to stress the importance of smoking cessation, the most important work we can do is with our youth in preventing our kids from taking up tobacco use and smoking in the first place. According to the Federal Trade Commission, the tobacco industry spent more than \$125 million a year marketing its products in Oregon between 1998 and 2008, and many of those dollars were aimed at hooking young people on tobacco products. Yet our efforts to deter young Oregonians from beginning to smoke in the first place have plateaued. Almost no one starts smoking after age 25. In fact, nine out of ten smokers started smoking by age 18.<sup>i</sup>

Increasing Oregon's cigarette taxes is a WIN-WIN. An increase in the cigarette tax is a health win that helps to reduce smoking and saves lives, and a financial win that raises revenue and reduces health care costs.

### Health:

Rates of smoking have been falling in Oregon and across the nation over the past decades as tobacco taxes have increased, but we can't allow our progress to curtail our future efforts. There could be 3 million fewer young smokers today if success in reducing youth tobacco use that was made between 1997 and 2003 had been sustained.<sup>ii</sup>

Despite overall reductions in the smoking rate, tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death in Oregon, claiming the lives of more than 6,000 Oregonians each year—more lives than car accidents, suicide, AIDS, and murder combined. In addition to this unnecessary loss of life, tobacco use costs the state more than \$2 billion each year in health costs and lost productivity.

An increase in the cigarette tax will help combat both of these issues: the higher cost will deter people from starting to smoke, and the revenue generated will help fund critical health services and tobacco cessation programs.

An increase in the cigarette tax is especially important in deterring youth from starting to use tobacco products. As tobacco companies search for “replacement smokers,” they often deliberately target their advertisements at teens and young adults. If an individual never begins smoking, they are much less likely to become addicted, and young people have been proven to be particularly price sensitive. The younger a person is when they begin smoking, the greater his or her chances are of ultimately becoming addicted. 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 their addiction to nicotine.<sup>iii</sup>

## Revenue

In addition to preventing people from smoking, increasing the cigarette tax will generate revenue to help fund critical health services and tobacco cessation programs. Additional revenue generated by the cigarette tax increase would support programs that assist Oregonians who have tobacco-related conditions, and who are working to kick the habit.

At a time when the state budget is in crisis, increasing the cigarette tax is a common sense step we can take to generate funding for some of these critical prevention programs and efforts. Increasing the cigarette tax by \$1 is conservatively estimated to generate \$77 million dollars.<sup>iv</sup>

## Public Support

In recent sessions and ballot measures, Oregonians and this legislature have shown their willingness to fight addiction with every tool they have. Over 70% of the public supported a tobacco tax increase when last polled in 2010. Tobacco taxes, along with expanding access to smoking-cessation programs, are working.<sup>v</sup>

As a nurse and an educator, I urge you to support this legislation and to act in the best interests of our children and all Oregonians.

Please support passage of House Bill 2275.

Thank you.

---

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. U.S. Surgeon General's Office. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults*. 2012. Web. <[http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data\\_statistics/sgr/2012/consumer\\_booklet/pdfs/consumer.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2012/consumer_booklet/pdfs/consumer.pdf)>.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> 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>.

<sup>iv</sup> Tobacco Prevention and Education Program. *Oregon Tobacco Facts & Laws*. Portland, Oregon: Oregon Department of Human Services, Oregon Public Health Division, 2010.

<sup>v</sup> Polling conducted by conducted by Davis, Hibbits & Midghall Inc.