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**Person-Centered Behavioral & Physical Health Care    Public Health & Prevention    Regulatory and Population Health    Health Management Services**

March 12, 2013  
House Revenue Committee  
HB 2275 – Tobacco Tax Increase

Good Morning Chair Barnhart and House Revenue Committee:

My name is Sara Hartstein and I am the Tobacco Prevention Coordinator at Benton County Health Department. I am here to talk about the benefits associated with an increased tobacco tax as proposed in HB 2275.

There are a few points that I would like to make this morning:

Tobacco use inflicts a tremendous toll on the people who live in my county. In one year, 7,456 adults regularly smoke cigarettes and 1,769 people suffer from a serious illness caused by tobacco use. Eighteen percent of all deaths in Benton County are due to tobacco use, even though we have among the lowest tobacco use rates in Oregon. Each year in Benton County we spend \$17 million on medical care for tobacco-related illnesses and it is estimated that \$15 million is lost in productivity due to tobacco-related deaths.

Increasing the tobacco tax decreases consumption -- especially amongst price-sensitive youth as their smoking prevalence is strongly correlated with cigarette pack prices. Research has shown that tobacco tax increases are one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking rates. Every 10 percent increase in cigarette prices reduces youth smoking by about seven percent, and total cigarette consumption by about four percent.

Dedicating a portion of the tobacco tax revenue into the Tobacco Use Reduction Account to fund the Tobacco Prevention and Education Program is an important way to reduce tobacco use and improve the health of Oregonians. In Oregon, tobacco use causes 7,000 deaths due to tobacco-related illness, 650 deaths due to exposure to secondhand smoke, and costs Oregon more than 5 billion per biennium (this includes Oregon Health Plan costs). Americans consistently and overwhelmingly support tobacco tax revenue to be used for tobacco prevention and education programs, in order to help tobacco users quit, prevent youth from starting, and protect people from secondhand smoke.

Oregon's tobacco use rates have declined due in large part to Oregon's Tobacco Prevention and Education Program efforts at the state and local level. Through this program, all county health departments in Oregon receive some of the current cigarette tax revenue which funds local tobacco prevention efforts. This program has been particularly impactful in my county. I have many examples of local work that protects residents and children from secondhand smoke and prevents youth from smoking. However, I'd like to share one recent success -- while working closely with Linn-Benton Housing Authority we established a no smoking policy for 192 rental housing units. Through bringing together community organizations, we implemented a policy that will protect children from smoke exposure and create environments where people are not smoking in the home.

Public Health research shows that with successful and well-funded local tobacco prevention programs further decreases in tobacco use rates are possible. The benefits would include improving the overall health of the population, reducing health care costs, and reducing lost work-time and other employer costs. Tobacco taxation is one example of well-researched, evidence-based preventive health.

Thank you for your time, and for allowing me to provide the Committee with this educational testimony.

Sara Hartstein  
Tobacco Prevention and Education Coordinator

***"Healthu People in a Healthu Community"***