

**House Revenue Committee**  
**March 15, 2013**  
**Linda Modrell, Benton County Commissioner**

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, my name is Linda Modrell. This year I serve as Vice-Chair of the Board of Benton County Commissioners and I am the Chair of the AOC Human Services Steering Committee.

I am here today in support of HB 2870 which would give counties the option of increasing the tobacco tax in their communities.

- We all know the numbers behind tobacco use: It has the dubious distinction of ranking first among preventable causes of death in the United States and in Oregon.
- The Oregon Health Authority estimates tobacco use kills about 7,000 people a year in our state. That's the equivalent of every man, woman and child in a city the size of Scappoose (6,655) or Hood River (7,320).
- By anybody's definition, losing the equivalent of a good-sized city each year is a public health crisis.
- And these deaths tend to be lingering and often the result of what tends to be a chronic disease.
- As county officials, County Commissioners are responsible for the public health.
- And with House Bill 2870, we have a chance to invest in improving the public's health AND bending the expense curve of our medical system.

This bill simply removes the state ban on a local tobacco tax. It does not require us, as counties, to add a tobacco tax -- that would be a local decision and will not make sense in all 36 counties. But for those counties where residents support the idea, this bill would remove a one-size-fits-all that limits counties' flexibility to consider commonsense, innovative local solutions.

- A local tobacco tax is hardly a novel concept in the rest of the country. There are an estimated 566 jurisdictions nationwide that have their own cigarette tax rates, bringing in more than \$500 million in revenue.

- And this bill's requirement that at least \$1 out of every \$5 dollars from a tax goes toward public health locks in a direct nexus between the public health problem and the solution we'd like to consider.
- Counties are hurting financially; House Bill 2870 is one tool we can use to help bridge the financial gap. Lifting the local preemption on tobacco taxes is a twofer: a tax increase significantly reduces the number of youth who will become smokers as well as reduces the number of cigarettes consumed by adults.
- As you know tobacco is an addictive drug and youth are especially sensitive to nicotine and can become dependent more quickly than adults. Because of the dependency, close to 3 out of 4 teen smokers continue using tobacco products into adulthood.
- The best way to prevent tobacco use is to stop children from starting the habit. Raising tobacco taxes is a proven way to achieve that public health goal—studies show every 10 percent increase in the price of cigarettes reduces youth smoking by about 7 percent.
- Studies also show that same 10 percent price increase reduces overall cigarette consumption by 4 percent.

The basic argument for House Bill 2870 boils down to this: We want to remove the restrictions that hamstring even a local discussion about solutions to a long-time public health crisis.

Please consider this bill as a tool that can contribute to the improved health status of Oregonians.