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# Multnomah County Health Department



March 12, 2015

Good morning Chair Hass, and members of the committee,

I am here today to express my support for Senate Bill 14, which removes the current preemption against local government imposition of taxes on cigarettes and tobacco products. As the Director of Public Health for Multnomah County Health Department, I have a vested interest in serving and protecting our community. As a mother and public health leader to the health department, I am dedicated to promoting health and wellness and reducing health disparities in the many communities I serve.

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death in this country. In Multnomah County alone, 1,183 people die from tobacco use annually. Furthermore, \$223.2 million is spent each year on medical care for tobacco-related illnesses. Another \$195.7 million in productivity is lost due to tobacco-related illness and early death.

Nearly 90 percent of all adult smokers begin before the age of 18. We know that price makes a difference, especially in discouraging young people from starting. As stated in the Surgeon General's Report, raising tobacco-product prices decreases tobacco use, particularly among youth and young adults. The report concludes that **raising tobacco taxes** is one of the most effective tobacco prevention and control strategies.

Reducing use and exposure to tobacco is an issue of equity and a critical determinant of health disparities. Tobacco products are unfairly and disproportionately marketed and sold in low-income communities and communities of color which in turn, hurt our neighbors and families by causing chronic health problems and premature death. Studies confirm that tobacco industry differentially appeals to people with the lowest income and education through point of sale advertising, and there is more tobacco advertising in predominately racially diverse and low income neighborhoods. For example, marketing to Hispanics and American Indians/Alaska Natives has included advertising and promotion of cigarette brands with names such as Rio, Dorado, and American Spirit. Additionally, Menthol cigarettes are more likely to be marketed in stores near schools with higher proportions of African American students. Furthermore, tobacco companies promote specific brands to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) populations through outdoor advertising, ads in gay-oriented magazines, nightclub promotions, and event sponsorships. The Multnomah County Health Department supports statewide policies to reduce disparities, particularly within communities of color.

Counties across Oregon, including Multnomah County, face the challenge of increasing public health care costs and the growing needs for additional services. Lifting preemption would provide another tool for our leaders to use to have population reach and impact while addressing the disproportionate use of, and diseases caused by tobacco. Communities are in crisis and we need to be able to consider all tools necessary to raise resources to meet local needs and address our critical health disparities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this very important bill before you today.

Sincerely,

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