

TO: Chair Beyer & Committee Members
Senate Committee on Business & Transportation

DATE: April 7, 2015

RE: SB 417

Chair Beyer and members,

On behalf of the American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association, thank you for the opportunity to address tobacco use, Oregon's number one preventable cause of death.

We support SB 417, which would help protect kids from the dangers of tobacco addiction.

In 1992, Congress passed the Synar Amendment, requiring states to:

- Enact laws prohibiting the sale and distribution of tobacco products to minors
- Enforce these laws in a way that can reasonably be expected to reduce the availability of tobacco products to youth under the age of 18
- Conduct random, unannounced inspections of tobacco outlets
- Report annual findings to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services

While most states require vendors obtain a license to sell tobacco—a mechanism that allows the state to educate retailers and enforce laws—Oregon does not. As a result, Oregon lags behind the rest of the country in implementation and enforcement of the prohibition of tobacco sales to minors.

Oregon far outpaced any other state in the illegal sale of tobacco to kids. For the past three years, Oregon led the nation with the highest illegal sales rate of tobacco. In 2013, Oregon retailers were caught selling tobacco to minors at the highest rate in the country and more than double the nationwide average, at 22.5 percent.

In 2014, the retailer violation rate for sales to kids hit 16.3 percent in the past year, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Out of 835 attempted buys, 136 were successful. Even with the recent decrease, Oregon's rate likely remains among the highest in the country. The national average last year was 9.6 percent, according to a report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

To put those numbers in perspective: Today, 1 in 6 Oregon kids are able to buy tobacco products. That adds up. Over 200,000 of today's Oregon kids will become smokers. Disturbingly, 68,000 of those Oregon youth who are alive today will die prematurely from smoking.¹

We know what policies work to save lives. With over 90% of adult smokers starting before the age of 18 and 99% before age 26², policies that prevent kids from ever starting to use tobacco can make a huge impact.

¹ Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, "Key State-Specific Tobacco-Related Data & Rankings"

² U.S. Surgeon General, "Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth & Young Adults – Fact Sheet"
<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/preventing-youth-tobacco-use/factsheet.html>

To date 38 states regulate the tobacco retail environment by requiring retail licensing. Oregon should be next.

We urge the legislature to pass SB 417 as introduced.

Thank you,
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