



Letter in Support of Raising the Minimum Legal Sale Age to 21

April 15, 2015

To whom it may concern,

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is pleased to submit this letter in support of Oregon's efforts to reduce tobacco use among young people by raising the minimum legal sale age (MLSA) of tobacco to 21. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is the nation's largest non-profit, non-governmental advocacy organization solely devoted to reducing tobacco use and its deadly toll by advocating for public policies that prevent kids from smoking, help smokers quit and protect everyone from secondhand smoke.

Tobacco remains this nation's number one preventable cause of premature death and disease, killing more than 480,000 Americans annually, including 5,500 in Oregon. Virtually all of them started using tobacco before age 21¹. Each year, 12,800 kids in Oregon try cigarettes for the first time; and 3,300 additional kids become new regular, daily smokers. Without additional action to reduce tobacco use, 68,000 of the youth in Oregon today will die early from a tobacco-related disease. Because tobacco is so harmful, we should do everything we can to prevent its use among young people.

The Institute of Medicine, one of the most prestigious scientific authorities in the United States, recently issued a comprehensive report concluding that raising the tobacco legal sale age to 21 will have a substantial positive impact on public health and save lives over the long term.² It finds that raising the tobacco sale age will significantly reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who start smoking; reduce smoking-caused deaths; and immediately improve the health of adolescents, young adults and young mothers who would be deterred from smoking, as well as their children.

Raising the legal age for the sale of tobacco products to 21 is an important step that will protect youth and young adults from the unrelenting efforts of the tobacco industry to hook them to a deadly addiction. If Oregon adopts MLSA of 21, it will join over 50 localities in 7 states that have enacted the provision. Several states, including California, Hawaii, and Washington, are currently considering state-wide laws.

Sincerely,

Beverly J. May

Beverly May, Director of Advocacy, Oregon
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

¹ National data show that 95 percent of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21, and a substantial number of smokers start even younger—more than 80 percent of adult smokers first try smoking before age 18. Calculated based on data in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2012, <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/SAMHDA/>.

² Institute of Medicine, *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*, March 12, 2105, <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2015/TobaccoMinimumAgeReport.aspx>