

TO: Chair Prozanski and committee members
Senate Committee on Judiciary

DATE: April 15, 2015

RE: SB 732

Chair Prozanski 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 732, which would help protect kids from the dangers of tobacco addiction.

Right now, 90 percent of tobacco users take up this dangerous habit before the age of 18 and almost no one starts after the age 25. If we raise the age of sale for tobacco products, we can perhaps stop a young person from indulging in that first puff, and hopefully keep them tobacco-free for their entire lifetime.

The Food and Drug Administration does not have the authority to raise the minimum age of sale above 18. State and local governments instead have that power and would play a critical part in implementing any increase in the current minimum age.

Four states have already raised the age to 19, and some municipalities, such as New York, have raised the age to 21. A recent report from the Institute of Medicine notes that preventing those under 21 from buying tobacco would result in a 12% decrease in tobacco use, while preventing those from under 19 would result in a 3% decrease.

If Oregon uses this policy change in conjunction with other proven strategies such as raising tobacco taxes, funding tobacco prevention programs, and establishing retail licensure, we can save young lives and hopefully end the tobacco epidemic in our nation.

One common argument against raising the legal age of purchase to 21 is this: Once someone is old enough to serve in the military and to vote, they should be considered old enough to choose whether or not to smoke. The Department of Defense, however, has taken a strong stance against tobacco use by its service men and women. That's why they have set a goal to dramatically reduce the use of all tobacco by 2020. They have not only stopped distributing cigarettes to service members as part of their rations, but the DoD is calling for structural reforms in how and where they allow tobacco purchases to be made.

We urge the legislature to pass SB 732.

Thank you,
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