



Association of
Oregon Counties

DATE: FEBRUARY 3, 2016

TO: HOUSE HEALTH COMMITTEE

FROM: STACY MICHAELSON, ASSOCIATION OF OREGON COUNTIES

SUBJECT: HB 4062

Chair Greenlick, Members of the Committee:

For the record, I am Stacy Michaelson, with the Association of Oregon Counties. AOC collectively represents Oregon's 36 counties. Earlier this week, our association voted to support HB 4062.

As the Local Public Health Authority, counties have not only a vested interest in, but a responsibility to discourage the use of harmful products. As you are aware, one of the primary rationales behind taxing tobacco products has been to reduce the number of users. We know that taxation has a particularly powerful impact when it comes to youth who may be considering trying such products, hopefully reducing the number of lifetime smokers. And counties utilize the tax dollars for their tobacco cessation programs, which target a wide range of individuals.

As the health impact of smoking has become widely recognized, we have seen a recent rise in the use of electronic cigarettes and "vape pens" as an alternative nicotine delivery system. This is a rapidly growing industry and regulations are only beginning to catch up. With a predominance of flavored products – such as bubble gum and strawberry – there is a great concern over the appeal to youth. There seems to be a sense that these products are healthier alternatives to traditional cigarettes; however, the reality is that we are still learning about the potential effects of the various ingredients used in these products. And we already know about the additive properties of nicotine. If our goal is to promote community health, we need to make every effort to discourage the use of substances that are known to be addictive.

Only in recent decades have we realized the full health impact of smoking – and the associated health care costs. With alternative nicotine delivery systems poised to become the next big trend, we want to be mindful of the health issues we know exist and the potential for ongoing research to further illuminate the impact of these products. With that in mind, we want to see strong regulations of these products, particularly regarding youth access and exposure, and we do not want to incentivize their use, which is exactly what we are doing if we continue to tax cigarettes but not e-cigarettes.

With a dedicated portion of this potential revenue going to public health efforts, we are in favor of HB 4062. We believe this is the right next step in addressing this growing market, and we urge your aye vote.

Thank you.