

4/24/17

Chair Greenlick and members of the committee,

My name is Katy King and I'm here on behalf of the March of Dimes in support of Senate Bill 754 A, which would raise the minimum age to purchase tobacco products to 21 years of age.

As you are aware, the minimum age to purchase tobacco is 18 years old. On average, ninety percent of adult smokers begin smoking during teenage years. Raising the minimum age required to purchase tobacco products can significantly improve public health outcomes for women, children, and infants by delaying or preventing altogether the initiation of smoking or use of other tobacco products.

You are also probably aware that prenatal and postnatal environmental smoke exposure have proved devastating for the developing fetus as well as for young children. Exposure to tobacco smoke in utero or in the environment after birth has been linked to increased incidence of respiratory infections, ear infections, and behavioral disorders. Children and infants who are exposed to prenatal maternal smoking and in-home environmental tobacco smoke have a high incidence of severe asthma. Children and infants are often hospitalized longer for asthma and respiratory infections when compared to children who are not exposed to tobacco.

If these complications were not enough, tobacco use during pregnancy increases the risks of premature birth by more than 50 percent and low birth-weight by as much as 90 percent. Babies born with these complications average \$49,000 in medical costs during the first year, compared to \$4,500 for a birth without complications.

In Oregon, 10.6 percent of pregnant women used tobacco during the last three months of pregnancy. Women between 18 and 24 had a significantly higher prenatal smoking rate, above 18 and a half percent. The women most deterred from smoking by this bill are also the ones most likely to smoke during pregnancy.

Half of Oregon's births are paid for by Medicaid, and pregnant women on Medicaid are over five times more likely to smoke during pregnancy. The state is also paying a disproportionate share of the financial cost for prenatal smoking.

Failure to decrease the use of tobacco and environmental tobacco exposure will cause continued poor health outcomes for mothers, infants, and children.

The March of Dimes supports legislative and regulatory action to reduced exposure to tobacco smoke among pregnant women and infants. We ask that you support SB 754 A, and look forward to working with you to ensure that all babies are given the best chance at a healthy start in life.