



Testimony in Support of HB 2056-2

May 11, 2017

House Revenue Committee

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Chair Barnhart and members of the committee,

Thank you for opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in support of HB 2056-2 to remove the prohibition against the imposition of taxes by counties on cigarettes and tobacco products. By allowing counties to levy their own tobacco tax, the -2 amendments of this bill would allow counties to engage in further tobacco-use reduction policies and raise local standards and provide vital support for local public health programs to help offset the detrimental effects of tobacco use.

The Oregon Nurses Association is proud to represent hundreds of nurses serving some of Oregon's most vulnerable populations through local public health departments throughout the state. ONA supports policies that focus on prevention of chronic disease and promote wellness. ONA members work directly with patients to prevent them from smoking, and to help those who already use tobacco access the resources they need to quit. Tobacco use is widely known to cause heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and cancer, and those who use tobacco often face a lifetime of health consequences.

The most effective way to ensure someone does not smoke or use tobacco is to prevent them from starting. Nine out of ten smokers begin smoking before the age of 18, and the younger a person is when they begin smoking, the greater his or her chances are of ultimately becoming a lifelong tobacco user. This makes prevention especially important for Oregon's youth. Research shows that smoking at an early age increases the risk of developing lung cancer or experiencing other chronic health problems in adulthood due to nicotine addiction.ⁱ

Increasing the price of cigarettes and tobacco products can be a significant deterrent for youth—who are often most sensitive to price—to start smoking, increasing the odds that they will stay smoke-free. The revenue raised by a county tobacco tax can help fund vital public health services such as tobacco prevention and cessation programs, Babies First!, and school based health centers.

Counties around the state struggle to fund public health and other services, and find themselves consistently at risk of losing state funds, and as a result, matching federal dollars. With the future of state and federal funding for health care and public health programs increasingly insecure, now is the time to give local governments the freedom to levy tobacco taxes and help protect Oregonians from additional painful reductions in services.

Please support passage of House Bill 2056 with the -2 amendments.

ⁱ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids Factsheet, *The Path to Smoking Addiction Starts at Very Young Ages*, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0127.pdf>.