



May 11, 2017

To: House Revenue Committee

From: Charles S. Tauman, President, Tobacco-Free Coalition of Oregon

Re: HB 2056 -2 Amendments - Removing prohibition against local government imposition of taxes on tobacco products

Smoking kills more people than alcohol, AIDS, traffic collisions, illegal drugs, and suicide combined with thousands more dying from smokeless tobacco and secondhand smoke exposure. Studies, and experience in state after state show that higher cigarette taxes are one of the most effective ways to reduce smoking among both youth and adults. Therefore, the Tobacco-Free Coalition of Oregon (TOFCO) supports increasing tobacco taxes and, in the present context, removing the prohibition against local governments passing tobacco taxes to allow Oregon counties and cities to pass such taxes if they choose.

TOFCO is a statewide anti-tobacco advocacy non-profit association that includes businesses, organizations and individuals who promote programs and policies that will decrease the toll of tobacco use in Oregon.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States and in Oregon. It causes diseases such as cancer, COPD, heart disease and strokes resulting in the deaths of approximately 7,000 Oregonians a year.

Tobacco use by Oregon high school students continues to be a serious problem with use of non-traditional tobacco and nicotine inhalant products on the rise.

Experts agree that tobacco use results in significant burdens to society, including higher medical costs, lost economic productivity due to illness and mortality and health complications due to secondhand smoke. Tobacco use costs Oregon's businesses, governments and taxpayers more than \$2 billion annually.

Studies have shown that 80 percent of current adult smokers would like to quit and even more wish they had never started.

Finally, public opinion polls in Oregon have consistently shown that increasing tobacco taxes is supported by a vast majority of voters.

Therefore, increasing tobacco taxes is a win, win, and win solution for the Oregon Legislature. For Oregonians, it is a health win because reducing smoking saves lives and reduces exposure to secondhand smoke. For Oregon taxpayers, it is a financial win because it raises revenue and reduces health care costs. And for Oregon policy makers, it is a political win because increasing tobacco taxes is popular with the public.

While TOFCO has consistently supported an increase in STATEWIDE tobacco taxes, that prospect seems remote at this time. The next best legislative action is to repeal the statewide prohibition against Oregon counties and cities from passing their own tobacco tax. This has the ancillary benefit of providing a source of new revenue for Oregon's financially struggling counties.

For these reasons, TOFCO urges SUPPORT for the -2 amendments to HB 2056 and for the bill as so amended.