

February 7, 2017

Senate Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE – HR B
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: SB 235 - Tobacco Retail Licensing

Chair Monnes Anderson, members of the committee, my name is Dr. Jennifer Vines and I am the Deputy Health Officer for Multnomah County Health Department. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of SB 235.

As a family doctor with board certification in preventive medicine and public health, I have spent nearly 10 years working in primary care and public health in the Portland metro area. I have seen the devastating effect of tobacco use on individual patients, and am here today to support the efforts to keep young people from using nicotine in the first place. As a parent and a physician, I support a statewide tobacco retail licensing program.

Oregon is one of nine states in the country that does not require retailers to have a license to sell tobacco. SB 235 will ensure that all retailers in Oregon are equipped with the appropriate information and tools to keep tobacco and nicotine inhalant products out of the hands of our young people and help protect them from a lifetime of addiction and poor health.

In Multnomah County, our Commissioners have been concerned about the number of youth accessing and using tobacco and nicotine inhalant products. A snapshot from 2015 showed one in 10 8th graders in Multnomah County using some type of tobacco product, and we continue to see disparities in the use of these products based on race. That same year nearly one in four of all 11th graders used a tobacco or nicotine product, more among those who identified with more than one race.

Tobacco retail licensing is a best practice for enforcing minimum legal sales age laws. A study of 26 communities with strong enforcement of their licensing laws showed dramatic decreases in sales to minors in all but one. In 11 communities, the youth sales rate dropped by over 30 percent.

Given these data, our Board of County Commissioners adopted a tobacco retail license ordinance in November of 2015 and tobacco retail licensing was implemented on July 1, 2016. As of January 24, 2017, we have successfully licensed 723 retailers who have paid an annual fee of \$580 in order to lawfully sell tobacco and nicotine inhalant products in Multnomah County.

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We are proud to say that tobacco retail licensing in Multnomah County has been a highly successful new program. Multnomah County worked conscientiously with businesses, providing materials in seven languages and notifying business owners of the new license requirement in multiple industry publications. The county intentionally delayed compliance activities for the first six months to allow time for outreach and education to retailers. We intend to continue providing assistance to tobacco retailers to help them comply with the ordinance and remedy violations found during inspections. We are also prepared to enforce penalties in accordance with our rules if needed.

We appreciate that although SB 235 holds the clerk responsible for selling to a minor, the owner of the business is **also** held responsible and must ensure adequate training is provided to employees.

We also support **not penalizing youth in any way** for possessing tobacco or nicotine inhalant products. We recognize that many of our youth, especially our youth from communities of color, are addicted to these products and deserve support to quit rather than fines or legal action.

We appreciate your dedication to this very important issue. I want to thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Vines, MD, MPH
Deputy Health Officer
Multnomah County Health Department