

Providence Health & Services
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February 14, 2017

The Honorable Laurie Monnes Anderson
Chair, Senate Committee on Health Care
State Capitol
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Senate Bill 754 - Tobacco 21

Dear Senator Monnes Anderson and members of the committee:

Providence Health & Services is committed to working with policy makers and other community-minded organizations to find new ways to create healthier communities, together. Fulfilling this vision requires proactive public policy that promotes healthy decision making – regardless of an individual’s age or socioeconomic status.

Senate Bill 754 supports this effort in a critical way, raising the sales age to 21 takes tobacco products out of Oregon high schools. Teenagers are extremely vulnerable to both the addictive properties of nicotine and pressure from their peer groups. Doing what we can to delay the use of tobacco products among minors has the potential to significantly reduce the total number of people who smoke, since 95% start smoking before the age of 21.

Beyond being a significant step toward improving the wellbeing and life expectancy of Oregonians, making these changes now is critical to the financial stability of Oregon’s Medicaid budget. With the prevalence of tobacco use among adult Oregon Health Plan members nearly two times higher than the general public and approximately 10% of annual OHP medical expenditures related to smoking – we cannot depend solely on education and tobacco cessation programs to bend this cost curve.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue; Providence hopes you’ll join us in supporting Senate Bill 754.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dave Underriner".

Dave Underriner
Chief Executive
Providence Health & Services - Oregon