

February 14, 2017

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

Re: SB 754 - Creates offense of selling tobacco products or inhalant delivery systems to person under 21 years of age

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 754.

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 raising the minimum legal sales age for tobacco and nicotine products to 21.

Adolescent brains are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of nicotine, and the initiation age of tobacco use is critical. Among adults who become daily smokers, approximately 90% report first use before reaching 19 years of age, and almost 100% report first use before age 26¹. The majority of underage users rely on social sources—like family and friends—to get tobacco², so raising the minimum legal sales age to 21 will mean that those who can legally obtain tobacco are less likely to be in the same social networks as high school students.

According to the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report released in 2015, “Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products,” if the minimum legal age were raised to 21 and implemented now across the US, there would be approximately 223,000 fewer premature deaths for those born between 2000 and 2019.³

The IOM report also suggests that raising the minimum legal sales age will reduce exposure to secondhand smoke and the prevalence of other tobacco products, further reducing their associated adverse health effects, both immediately and over time. Raising the minimum legal sales age would immediately improve the health of adolescents and young adults.

¹ US Dept of Health and Human Services. Preventing tobacco use among youth and young adults: A report of the Surgeon General. 2012.

² Oregon Healthy Teens Survey, 2015

³ Institute of Medicine, Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products, 2015

Thank you for your careful consideration of this important public health policy.

Sincerely,

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