

Chairman Headland and Members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee,

My name is Karen Nitzkowski from rural Harwood. I urge you to **vote yes on Senate Bill 2281.**

Increasing tobacco taxes is a proven public health strategy that reduces tobacco use, prevents addiction, especially among youth at their vulnerable age. The majority of people who use tobacco products started as teens.

Each year, approximately 1,000 North Dakotans die from smoking-related illnesses such as heart disease and cancer. Tobacco use continues to be one of the leading causes of preventable death in our state which strains our healthcare system.

At only 44 cents per pack, North Dakota's cigarette tax has not increased **since 1993** and now ranks **49th in the nation.**

This tax increase is long overdue. Raising tobacco taxes would be a critical step toward protecting public health, reducing tobacco use, and preventing more unnecessary deaths.

Thank you,

Karen Nitzkowski

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