

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

My name is John Illich, and I am here today as a parent in support of **Senate Bill 2281**. I urge you to give this bill a **Do Pass** recommendation.

Increasing tobacco taxes is a **proven public health strategy** that reduces tobacco use, prevents addiction—especially among youth—and lowers rates of heart disease, cancer, and lung conditions that place a significant strain on 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**, far below the national average of **\$1.97 per pack**. Meanwhile, the price of cigarettes in North Dakota has risen by **310%** due to company price hikes and inflation, while the tax has remained stagnant—once accounting for **24%** of the retail price in 1993 but now making up only **6%**.

Our surrounding states have significantly higher cigarette taxes—**Montana's tax is \$1.70 per pack, South Dakota's is \$1.53, and Minnesota's is \$3.04 per pack**. North Dakota's outdated rate is a missed opportunity to reduce smoking rates, improve public health, and ease the financial burden tobacco-related diseases place on our healthcare system.

This tax increase is long overdue. Raising tobacco taxes would be a **critical step toward protecting public health, discouraging tobacco use, and reducing the burden of tobacco-related diseases**. I urge you to vote **yes** on **SB 2281**.

Sincerely,
John Illich