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11:00 am CST

House Appropriations – Human Resources Division Committee for the 68<sup>th</sup> ND Legislative Assembly

Chairman Nelson, and members of the House Appropriations – Human Resources Division Committee hello, my name is Heather Austin, and I am the Executive Director for Tobacco Free North Dakota. The mission of Tobacco Free North Dakota is to improve and protect the public health of all North Dakotans by reducing the serious health and economic consequences of tobacco use, the state’s number one cause of preventable disease and death. We work to facilitate coalitions and to promote policy discussions across North Dakota, along with providing education and resources that are used to help prevent kids from ever starting the dangerous addiction to tobacco and nicotine. Thank you so much for your time this morning.

Today I am here to encourage continued, sustainable, and sufficient funding for the State Tobacco Prevention and Control Program in HB 1004, a bill relating to Department of Health and Human Services Budget and its tobacco control program.

Since the tobacco control program, with reduced funding, was restructured under the Department of Health back in 2017, TFND, and a number of our partners, continue to be utilized, along with other stakeholders and DHHS grantees, including ND Local Public Health Units, to accomplish the goals outlined in our State Plan for Tobacco Prevention and Control. The program has dealt remarkably well with doing the same work, or in some cases even more work, with less resources and funds. We have made great strides in what we accomplish for our citizens.

Of note, TFND is taking a lead alongside several of these same stakeholders and partners fulfilling work in our communities and schools educating and advocating for policy that would reduce e-cigarettes and vaping (ENDS) among our youth while also highlighting the dangers of these products. With the “vaping epidemic” announced by the FDA in 2018, and the COVID-19 pandemic that swept our country these past years, we know that lung health is as important as ever, and we know that there is still more work to be done to save the newest generation from the serious health and economic consequences of a lifelong addiction to tobacco.

To help mitigate these detriments and give young people an additional resource to fight nicotine addiction, in April of 2022, TFND, in partnership with Truth Initiative, launched the “This is Quitting” program in North Dakota. “This is Quitting” is a free, confidential, text to quit vaping program meant for youth and young adults aged 13-24. They simply text VAPEFREEND to 88709 and can enroll in 12 weeks of daily interactive, customized, text messages meant to give them tips and support to quit vaping and tobacco products. TFND views sponsoring this program as an important tool to help our kids, along with the proposed continued funding our comprehensive

prevention and cessation programming in North Dakota. I am encouraged to see some increased funding for both youth prevention and cessation treatment in the Governor's recommended budget for this biennium. I hope this committee approves those recommendations and continues to look for further ways to advance good investments in tobacco prevention and control in our state.

I cite all this to say that there is much being done for tobacco prevention and cessation policy in North Dakota, but that there is still much to do, and I think these combined efforts and collaborations are so important to continue to support with our time, talent, and treasure. Just think of the health impacts and potential for lives saved any increase in funding could provide for our state.

Along with my testimony, you are also receiving a copy of our Resolution of Support for a fully Funded Tobacco Prevention and Control Program for ND. The following organizations/entities signed TFND's resolution. (Attached): Bismarck Break Free Youth Board, Bismarck Tobacco Free Coalition, ND Medical Association, ND Public Health Association, Steele County Food Pantry Board, UMary Athletic Training and Kinesiology Dept., and UMary DPT Program.

Again, thank you for this time in front of you, Chairman Nelson, and the Committee. It is very appreciated. Please vote Do Pass with continued funding for Tobacco Prevention and Control included in HB 1004.

May I take any questions?

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Best Practices for Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs—2014. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014.