



March 1, 2023

Senators:

I am Valerie Schoepf, and I'm the president of Tobacco Free North Dakota, a mom, and an educator asking you to oppose HB 1229.

I work with a generation of North Dakota youth who are, thankfully, not accustomed to being asked "smoking or non-smoking." Rather, today's kids talk about vooping, preferred ADV, boxing, cigalike, and e-cigar. These are all vaping references, whereas language we're more accustomed to also is holding strong for cigarettes, cigars and smokeless tobacco like chew or snuff.

Also holding strong is North Dakota's embarrassingly low price of tobacco. For decades we have been known as a cheap tobacco state. Sad but true, a dozen eggs can now cost more in North Dakota than a pack of cigarettes. And correlation or not, our youth rate of high school cigarette smokers is 400% higher than the national average and our rate of youth who vape is double the national average. For anyone flirting with the snares of addiction, cigars are trending as an upper echelon choice as if somehow less harmful than other forms of nicotine. If anything, cigars generally pack more nicotine, the addictive component, than cigarettes.

With difficult addiction realities running rampant, a real opportunity for political leadership exists in how you vote today. HB 1229 would water down ND's smoke-free law working to protect all patrons and employees from the harms of secondhand smoke. The current law also protects a supportive environment for the 70% of smokers who in fact want to quit. ND voters passed our smoke-free law with vast support more than 10 years ago and that strong support for the status quo prevails.

These days everyone knows someone who has died or has difficult health complications due to smoking. My story is that I was 14 when I lost my dad due to

his tobacco addiction; he died of lung and brain cancer. He started smoking as a teenager here in ND, kicking off a lifelong addiction. He has 15 grandchildren who he never got to meet, and vice versa ... a lot of kids without a grandpa.

So we all have a sad story, but we also all have hope. Who do you envision when you hope addiction isn't their path? For me it's foremost my three children - Frances, John and Mary. To best support them and in working with youth, let's give them all a hand by supporting policies and environments that make it easier for them to make healthy choices. Our existing smoke-free law does that, no exceptions. Success - my kids and the kids I teach don't remember the days of "smoking or non-smoking." It is my hope and it is in your power for that to never become a part of their reality here in North Dakota even as they embark on hospitality jobs and social outings.

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death in ND -- we go in reverse if HB 1229 passes, so please stand strong to stand up against addiction.

Thank you.

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