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2:00pm CST

House Appropriations – Human Resources Division Committee for the 69th 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 today.

I am here to encourage continued, sustainable, and sufficient funding for the State Tobacco Prevention and Control Program in HB 1012, the bill relating to Department of Health and Human Services Budget and its Tobacco Prevention and Control Program.

Since the tobacco control program, with reduced funding, was restructured under the Department of Health back in 2017, TFND, ND Local Public Health Units, health system partners, and other DHHS grantees, continue to collaborate 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. Today we encourage a continued advancement of funding to address targeted issues facing our citizens, such as were identified by this body in 2023 to address youth prevention engagement and pharmacological access in rural communities.

To support these efforts, TFND is taking a lead alongside several 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 additional funding allocated to this effort in last biennium's budget, we have continued to address the "vaping epidemic" announced by the FDA in 2018. TFND launched a "Train the Trainer" program in addition to our regular webinar series for continuing prevention education and our online resource hub. Combining efforts to empower local experts we can exponentially affect needs across ND. We hope to continue these efforts in the next biennium because 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.

Another initiative TFND launched recently was designed to help young people with an additional resource to fight nicotine addiction, is a partnership with Truth Initiative, a national advocacy organization, to bring 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.

Again, I am encouraged to see funding for both youth prevention and cessation treatment in the 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 would also encourage the committee not to allow the proposed cut to the TCPC media line item. Educating North Dakotans about the dangers of nicotine for all citizens is still vital to reducing overall use. It would be a shame to lose the momentum gained in this area over the past several years, as new products continue to come out at a lightning pace to entice new users.

I hope my time in front of you today highlights that there is much being done for tobacco prevention and cessation policy in North Dakota, but that there is still so much more to do, and I think our 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 Tobacco Free Coalition, Blue Zones Projects Grand Forks, Cavalier County Commission, C+K Counseling, Grand Forks Tobacco Free Coalition, Legacy High Stop the Cloud, Nelson-Griggs Board of Health, North Dakota Medical Association, Upper Missouri District Health Unit, Walsh County Board of Health, Walsh County Tobacco Free Coalition, Walsh County District Health, Walsh County Substance Use Prevention Coalition, and Western Plains Board of Health.

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 1012.

May I take any questions?

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¹ 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.