



IN FAVOR HB 1570: Protecting North Dakota's Youth and Future

Chelsea Ridge
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Chairman Headland and Representatives of the House Finance and Taxation Committee,

My name is Chelsea Ridge, and I am the chairwoman of the North Dakota Public Health Association (NDPHA) Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Section. Our vision is a North Dakota where every person can live their healthiest life. I am here to provide testimony In Favor of House Bill 1570, to increase the price on tobacco products in North Dakota.

North Dakota has not updated its tobacco tax structure since 1993, leaving us among the states with the lowest tobacco taxes in the nation. By passing HB 1570, we can take a critical step toward reducing chronic disease, increasing economic benefits, and providing much-needed prevention resources for our youth.

Despite the federal age restriction of 21 for purchasing tobacco products, youth vaping remains a serious issue in our state. Recent statewide SYNAR tobacco inspections (July–September 2024) revealed that **16.8% of retailers failed compliance** and sold tobacco products to underage individuals. If North Dakota's failure rate reaches 20% or higher, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) could withhold up to 40% of our Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant funding.

For the past 20 years, the number of North Dakota students experiencing feelings of sadness and hopelessness has steadily increased. Evidence shows a strong link between youth anxiety, depression, and the use of electronic vaping devices. Many young people turn to vaping for temporary relief, only to become trapped in a cycle of addiction that worsens their mental health over time.

Tobacco is a **gateway drug**—it primes the developing brain for addiction, increasing the risk of dependency on other substances. We have a responsibility to protect our youth from these dangers.

By voting **YES on HB 1570**, we take a stand for youth health, public safety, and long-term economic stability. Let's update North Dakota's outdated tobacco policies and invest in prevention efforts that truly make a difference.

Stand with our youth. Vote in favor of HB 1570.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Sincerely,

Chelsea Ridge