

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1570

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Chairman Rep. Headland, and Vice Chairman Rep. Hagert, and distinguished members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee,

My name is Megan Schneider, and I currently serve as the President of the Bismarck Tobacco-Free Coalition. Additionally, I am a respiratory therapist, educator, and Tobacco Treatment Specialist with nearly a decade of experience in the field of respiratory care.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify in strong support for raising North Dakota's tobacco tax by \$1.09, bringing the total tax to \$1.53 per pack. This policy change is an urgent and necessary step to protect public health, particularly for our youth and young adults.

North Dakota's tobacco tax has not been raised since 1993, making it the second lowest in the nation. As a result, the affordability of cigarettes and other tobacco products continues to contribute to high rates of youth tobacco use. Research has consistently shown that increasing tobacco taxes is one of the most effective strategies to reduce smoking, particularly among young people. A study published in *Scientific Reports* found that tobacco tax hikes significantly decrease adolescent smoking rates, with immediate deterrent effects. Additionally, findings from *BMC Public Health* confirm that higher cigarette prices and taxes correlate directly with lower smoking prevalence among young adults aged 18 to 24.

The benefits of raising the tobacco tax extend beyond reducing youth smoking. *The American Journal of Public Health* found that state-level tax increases are effective across diverse populations, reducing overall smoking rates regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, or racial background. Furthermore, the U.S. Surgeon General has consistently emphasized that increasing the price of cigarettes is among the most powerful tools to prevent youth initiation and encourage cessation among current smokers.

In conclusion, I urge you to take action to increase the price of tobacco products in North Dakota. It is an essential step in reducing tobacco use, improving public health, and protecting future generations. I appreciate your consideration of this important issue, and I am confident that this measure will have a positive impact on our state's health and prosperity. Please vote yes on HB 1570.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

References:

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