



4342 15th Ave S, Ste 201A
Fargo, ND 58103

P (701) 293-6462

F (701) 235-2476

Monday - Friday, 8am - 5pm

info@myfirstlink.org

Chairman Headland and Members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee,

My name is Jennifer Illich, and I am the Executive Director of FirstLink, speaking in support of Senate Bill 2281. I urge you to give this bill a Do Pass recommendation.

Increasing tobacco taxes is a proven public health strategy that reduces tobacco use, prevents addiction—especially among youth—and lowers rates of heart disease, cancer, and lung conditions that place a significant strain on our healthcare system. Each year, approximately 1,000 North Dakotans die from smoking-related illnesses, making tobacco use one of the leading causes of preventable death in our state.

At only 44 cents per pack, North Dakota's cigarette tax has not increased since 1993 and now ranks 49th in the nation, far below the national average of \$1.97 per pack. Meanwhile, the price of cigarettes in North Dakota has risen by 310% due to company price hikes and inflation, while the tax has remained stagnant—once accounting for 24% of the retail price in 1993 but now making up only 6%. Our surrounding states have significantly higher cigarette taxes—Montana's is \$1.70 per pack, South Dakota's is \$1.53, and Minnesota's is \$3.04—yet North Dakota lags behind.

This tax increase is long overdue. Raising tobacco taxes would be a critical step toward protecting public health, reducing tobacco use, and preventing unnecessary deaths. It would also help fund essential services, including crisis intervention and mental health resources, ensuring that those struggling with tobacco-related illnesses or financial distress have access to support.

I urge you to vote yes on SB 2281.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Illich".

Jennifer Illich

Executive Director, FirstLink