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9:00 am CST

House Political Subdivisions Committee for the 67<sup>th</sup> ND Legislative Assembly

Chairman Dockter, and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee, hello, my name is Heather Austin, and I am the Executive Director for Tobacco Free North Dakota. Thank you for your time this morning.

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. Today I am here to encourage a Do Pass on SB 2156, or the bill raising the minimum purchase age for tobacco products to 21.

By ratifying Federal Tobacco Age of Purchase law in North Dakota, we take another step forward in protecting our youth from the dangerous nicotine addiction these products promote. We also make it easier for local enforcement and regulation to take place in our communities. Our U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has updated their guidance and requirements for Synar Regulations to reflect the new age of 21 and says, "States are expected to enforce underage access to reduce the illegal sale of tobacco products to individuals under the age of 21."<sup>i</sup> SAMHSA's guidance document further states, "Failure to comply with the requirements of the Synar Regulation can result in a State losing up to 10 percent of its Federal Block Grant funds for substance abuse prevention and treatment."<sup>ii</sup>

The North Dakota Behavioral Health Division received \$6,533,901 for the FFY 2020. A 10% reduction in funding would equal \$653,390.10. Any loss in funding would have significant impacts on prevention, treatment and recovery services currently being offered in North Dakota.

So, having North Dakota align with federal law makes good sense. We can lead the way in protecting our kids and all our citizens, creating healthier people and a healthier state, and we can ensure our state continues to receive funds our citizens certainly need, while making local compliance checks and enforcement an easier process throughout the state.

Again, thank you for this time in front of you, Chairman Dockter, and the Committee. It is very appreciated. Please vote Do Pass on SB 2156. May I take any questions?

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/synar-guidance-tobacco-21.pdf> (attached)

<sup>ii</sup> *Id.*