

THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS
CANCER CENTER

TO: Chairman, Mike Thompson
Members of the Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee

FROM: Roy A. Jensen, MD – Vice Chancellor and Director, The University of
Kansas Cancer Center

RE: HB 2269

DATE: March 22, 2023

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present written testimony to the committee in support of H.B. 2269, which raises the minimum age for the sale, purchase or possession of cigarettes, electronic cigarettes and tobacco product to 21 years of age.

I am Dr. Roy Jensen, Vice Chancellor and Director of The University of Kansas Cancer Center. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in our state and is estimated to kill over 5,600 Kansans this year. Tobacco use is one of the primary culprits and remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. More than 4,400 Kansans die of tobacco-related disease each year.

As a National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated comprehensive cancer center, it is the cancer center's responsibility to improve the health of Kansans and reduce the cancer burden in our region. One way we can dramatically cut Kansans chances of developing cancer is to prevent our youth from using tobacco products and becoming dependent on them. For many years, adolescent smoking rates have been declining, however, nearly one in five high school seniors still use tobacco.

Nearly all smokers start as kids or young adults. During the adolescent years (ages 18-21), experimentation with tobacco products can often accelerate into a daily habit. The adolescent brain is particularly vulnerable to the effects of a powerful addictive agent like nicotine. Exposure during this time period may result in long-lasting neurological receptor changes that lead to a lifetime nicotine habit and resulting illnesses.

Younger teens also benefit from raising the nicotine/tobacco age requirement. About 90% of those who provide cigarettes to kids under 18 are themselves under 21. As a result, raising the tobacco sales age to 21 has been shown to reduce high school smoking by over 50%.

In 2019, the President signed legislation amending the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, raising the federal minimum age for sale of tobacco products from 18 to 21 years. To date, 30 states and Washington, D.C., have passed laws limiting the purchase of tobacco to individuals under the age of 21. It is time for Kansas to follow suit.

Increasing the minimum age to purchase tobacco products to the age of 21 is one of the most important things we can do to protect our youth and improve the health of Kansans.

Kansas Tobacco Facts

- Tobacco is the number one cause of preventable death in Kansas
- 22 percent of high school students use e-cigarettes
- 390 kids (under 18) become new daily smokers each year
- 61,000 kids currently under 18 and in Kansas will die prematurely from smoking
- 15.6 percent of Kansas adults smoke, compared to the national average of 12.5 percent
- \$1.31 billion: Annual health care costs in Kansas directly caused by smoking
- \$255.1 million: Medicaid costs caused by smoking in Kansas
- \$923 per household: Residents' state & federal tax burden from smoking-caused government expenditures
- \$2.9 billion: Smoking-caused productivity losses in Kansas

Why does tobacco matter to KU Cancer Center?

Tobacco prevention and smoking cessation efforts are a significant component of the cancer center's NCI comprehensive cancer center designation. Research shows that 19 percent of all cancers could be eradicated if people no longer smoked. As part of our prevention efforts as an NCI Comprehensive Cancer Center, we are committed to educating the public about the dangers of tobacco use. It is our goal to see a 20 percent decrease in tobacco use over the next 15 years.

An increase to the age of 21 to purchase tobacco products would protect our youth, improve the health of Kansans dramatically and show the state's commitment to making meaningful reductions in tobacco use.

Please consider raising the age to purchase tobacco products - the lives of our youth and fellow Kansans depend on it.

Thank you.

<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/what-we-do/us/sale-age-21>