

To: Chairman Johnson and Members of the House Taxation
From: Mariana Ramirez

Date: March 9, 2018

Re: Written testimony in support of House Bill 2231

My testimony is based on my experience as a public health professional and my views don't necessarily reflect the views of my employer the University of Kansas Medical Center.

I am writing to express my support for the tobacco tax increase in the state of Kansas, specifically for HB2231, a bill that will prevent early death and increase funding to help people quit tobacco.

In my capacity as Project Director at Juntos Center for Advancing Latino Health in KU Medical Center I have managed several federally and privately-funded grants to expand smoking cessation research among Latinos. Smoking is a huge threat to Latino health. Smoking is related to the top causes of Latino deaths and currently 17% of Latinos adults and 14% of Latino high school students smoke.

As you know, Latinos are the largest minority population in the United States. Unfortunately, Latino smokers suffer from notable disparities in tobacco treatment and treatment response. Latinos are less likely than non- Hispanic whites to have access to healthcare, to have knowledge of existing smoking cessation resources, to receive advice to stop smoking, to participate in smoking cessation programs, or to utilize pharmacotherapy to stop smoking. This is why we support implementing evidence-based policies and programs to help people quit and prevent youth from ever starting to smoke. A \$1.50 per pack increase in the cigarette tax with parity for OTP, at 65% of the wholesale price will not only save 9000 lives in Kansas, but it will provide 5 million dollars to increase access to evidence based cessation resources that are so needed in our community.

In the past ten years, our multidisciplinary research team has demonstrated that when Latino smokers are given the resources to quit, they make a serious quit attempt and many do quit. Our participants have expressed gratitude when receiving assistance to quit "Thanks for your valuable help. I'm so glad there are people like you"! Others have expressed the benefits they have experienced by quitting smoking "Now I can play with my children without losing my breath."

Smoking cessation and prevention are very important issues for the Latino communities. I urge you to consider passing HB2231 to benefit our community.

Thanks,

Mariana Ramirez, LMSW
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