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February 13, 2017

The Honorable Caryn Tyson
Assessment & Taxation Committee
Kansas State Capitol
10th and Jackson, Room
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Re: Testimony in support of tobacco tax increase (SB 175)

Dear Senator Tyson:

I am writing this on behalf of my family, friends and many of your constituents.

Like so many of them, I am the daughter of an ex-smoker. Unlike most, my dad's main career from the time he was a teenager was as a rodeo clown and bull fighter. As often cowboys do, he started using tobacco. He tried so many times during his life to quit while at this same time the tobacco industry was trying to make sure he couldn't, by increasing the amount of nicotine and adding additives to cigarettes to make smoking more addictive and make it harder to quit.

My dad was kind of John Wayne tough. I sat in the stands multiple times witnessing him being hit or trampled by a 1500 plus pound bull and would soon hear the crowd of cowboys and emergency professionals circling around him, as he lie on the ground in the arena, laughing at something he said. This happened even when he was hurt bad enough to be hauled off in an ambulance after.

I'll never forget sitting in the hallway while my dad was behind a closed door having x-rays done. I never heard laughter. One of the techs finally opened the door and explained to me that they could not get the x-rays because dad was in too much pain to lay how they needed him to. She asked me to come in and see if I could help, maybe be some comfort for my dad so they could get what they had to have. My dad was in tears and in horrendous pain. I held his hand and helped him relax. We got thru the x-rays.

My dad had small cell lung cancer, caused by smoking. The tumors throughout his body were growing and the source of the intolerable pain. I spent nine months by his side. I held his hand through chemo and radiation, towards the end I held it thru talks of how he had done his job as a father and letting him know it was okay to go, and then I held his hand as he took his last breath. It was a horrific painful death.

I understand what tobacco can do to a family. I understand that feeling of wishing your dad could have chosen more time with us over the cigarettes and knowing he wanted to so bad. Sadly, I know others were glad to have him as a customer while they did and are targeting our kids to replace him. I understand the effects of smoking, second-hand smoke and third-hand smoke but, I do not understand why anyone who has the ability to prevent deaths from tobacco would choose not to.

In a month it will be 15 years since I last held my dad's hand. I know when life goes as plan we will outlive our parents but, I sure would have loved having my dad here with me longer. What makes it even harder is that what killed him is still killing others and people are still getting rich off of the products that caused his cancer. As a Kansas taxpayer I am tired of the cost that we incur from tobacco use and tired of paying my unfair share. Why shouldn't taxes on tobacco at least cover the health care cost that we all pay as a state due to its use?

Yes, I support the tobacco tax increase of \$1.00 or more. A significant increase in tobacco taxes will help offset what we as taxpayers are paying in healthcare cost attributed to its use in our state and will keep thousands of young Kansans from starting. Let's send a message to Kansas kids from Kansas lawmakers and citizens, by leading by example and prioritizing quality of life and family first.

We know tobacco products kill. It doesn't matter if you smoke it or chew it, it kills and causes hardships to families our healthcare system and Kansas businesses like the one my family owns. Why would we support any product when used as intended kills or causes chronic illnesses to so many? We need to increase taxes on all tobacco products.

We worry about citizens crossing state lines and border towns, their sale of tobacco and return on investment. How about the return on investment we, as Kansans receive when we prevent our kids from ever starting and adults from ever regretting this choice? That return, emotionally and financially, is arguably an immeasurable one. It'll be priceless to some. We know what works, and with that information comes great responsibility, to save money and lives.

I hope you come to understand how devastating not increasing the tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products would be. Put the health and hearts of Kansans first. You can be proud of being a part of this and know you saved lives when you do increase tobacco taxes.

Sincerely,

Conley Cornell
Coffeyville, KS