

February 13, 2017

March of Dimes Foundation

To: Kansas Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee
Senator Caryn Tyson, Chair

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From: Shalae Harris RN, BSN, MPA
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Re: SB 175- Income tax, rates, modifications, credits; cigarettes and tobacco products, rates;

I write on behalf of the March of Dimes that is advocating with our partners for SB 175 for a \$1.50 per pack increase and for other tobacco products an increase tax from 10% to 20% of wholesale. This increase could generate \$111 million in state revenues and brings a comparable tax to all other tobacco products, such as cigars and smokeless tobacco products, which has not changed since 1972. This increase will also help to save 10,200 lives, including our tiniest future Kansans. This is why March of Dimes is providing written testimony today.

The mission of the March of Dimes is to improve the health of women of childbearing age, infants, and children by preventing birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality. Premature birth is the leading cause of death in the first month of life, and a major determinant of illness and disability among infants, including developmental delays, chronic respiratory problems and blindness. Premature birth affects 1 in every 12 babies born in Kansas and is the second leading cause of infant mortality in our state. While we do not yet know all of the causes leading to premature birth, the science on tobacco use is clear. Women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely than nonsmokers to have a preterm or low birth weight baby. Kansas' current preterm birth rate is at 8.8%, with some of our counties as high as 9.8%. We can do better.

A baby's first-year medical costs, including both inpatient and outpatient care are about 10 times greater if born pre-term (\$32,325) than for full-term (\$3,325). Based on these estimates, for every 1,000 fewer babies born preterm, approximately \$29 million in first-year medical costs would be saved. In addition, exposure to secondhand smoke during pregnancy and after birth increases the risk of sudden unexplained infant death (SUID), a key contributor to infant mortality. We also know that pregnant women's exposure to smoke in our state is real and significant. In 2015, 11.0% of pregnant women (4,296 total) reported smoking during their pregnancy.

The good news is that prematurity associated with smoking while pregnant is preventable. Smoking is the single most modifiable risk factor for adverse pregnancy outcomes in developed countries. Whatever we can do to discourage women from smoking while pregnant and protect pregnant women and babies from the impacts of secondhand smoke is extremely worthwhile. This is why the March of Dimes has joined the effort to raise the state tobacco tax by \$1.50 knowing that it is beneficial in preventing 3,500 smoking affected pregnancies and births with a cost savings of \$8.72 million for these pregnancies over the next five years. Increasing tobacco taxes is a proven, effective way to prevent and reduce tobacco use. We believe that the legislature could do better than the Governor's proposal of \$1.00 per pack increase. Considering the increase of the tobacco tax by \$1.50 would significantly help improve birth outcomes in our state.

On behalf of the pregnant women and babies we work to protect, the March of Dimes urges the committee to support \$1.50 per pack increase and for other tobacco products an increase tax from 10% to 20% of wholesale. Please help us protect the health of our tiniest Kansans! Thank you for all that you do to support the health of Kansas residents.

For more information or questions, contact Shalae Harris, Director of Advocacy & Government Affairs, 316-619-6187 or sharris@marchofdimes.org