

Testimony in Support of SB 376

22 March 2018

Chairperson Tyson and Committee Members:

My name is Dalrona Harrison and I am testifying in support of SB 376, which increases the state cigarette tax by \$1.50 per pack and provides an equal increase on other tobacco products (OTP). The bill also invests a portion of the increased proceeds, \$5 million annually, for tobacco prevention and cessation.

I am a volunteer for the American Heart Association and serve on the AHA's State Advocacy Committee. I am also a Registered Nurse. The evidence is clear that tobacco use is the most preventable cause of death. In particular, tobacco use plays a strong role in cardiovascular disease. Increasing tobacco taxes is one of the most effective ways to curb use and prevent illness, particularly with children. Young people are very responsive to tobacco tax increases and quit at a rate that is double that of adults. Just as important, increasing the cost of tobacco is an impactful deterrent that keeps many children from ever trying the product.

In addition to the beneficial health impact that will result from fewer tobacco users, there is a financial savings that results as well. Currently, Kansas taxpayers spend over \$237 million annually on tobacco-related health care costs in the Medicaid program. There are also additional costs in the State Employee Health Plan resulting directly from tobacco use. Raising the tax will reduce use and the corresponding health-related costs that are borne by all Kansas taxpayers.

Finally, this revenue source is predictable and stable. While use will decline, additional revenue will result, providing a win-win for Kansas. In every state that has substantially raised tobacco taxes, there has been an increase in revenue that can be applied to the priority needs of the state.

A \$1.50 cigarette tax and equal OTP tax will provide necessary resources for Kansas funding priorities, reduce tobacco-related health care costs, and most importantly, save Kansas lives! I urge your approval of SB 376. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.