



11 Beacon Street, Suite 710  
Boston, MA 02108  
Phone: 617-723-6100  
Fax: 617-723-6111  
www.cobth.org

May 16, 2017

Senator Jason Lewis  
Massachusetts State House, Room 511B  
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Kate Hogan  
Massachusetts State House, Room 130  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Senator Lewis and Representative Hogan,

On behalf of the Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals (COBTH) I would like to express our strong support in favor of **Senate Bill 1218**, *An Act to Protect Youth from the Health Risks of Tobacco and Nicotine Addiction*, which proposes to limit tobacco and nicotine access by increasing the minimum legal sale age for tobacco products to 21 and prohibiting the sale of tobacco products in health care settings.

This legislation reflects a growing movement nationally and here in Massachusetts where a number of cities and towns have already increased the minimum legal age for the sale of tobacco products to 21. In 2005 the town of Needham became the first town in the nation to set a legal minimum age of 21 for tobacco product sales. As of May 2017, over 150 cities and towns have passed “Tobacco 21” legislation which covers approximately two thirds of the municipalities in the Commonwealth.

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, killing more than 480,000 people each year. It is known to cause cancer, heart disease, respiratory disease, and other health disorders which cost the U.S. as much as \$170 billion in health care expenditures each year. Each day, 580 persons under the age of 18 become regular daily smokers; and almost one-third will eventually die from smoking.

National data shows that 95 percent of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21, and a substantial number of smokers start even younger – about 80 percent of adult smokers first try smoking before age 18. **While fewer than half (46%) of adult smokers become regular, daily smokers before age 18, four out of five become regular, daily smokers before they turn 21. This means the 18 to 21 age range is a time when many smokers transition to regular use of cigarettes.**

A report issued in 2015 by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), one of the most prestigious scientific authorities in the U.S., found that raising the tobacco sale age to 21 will have a substantial positive impact on public health and save lives. The IOM report, based on a review of the literature and

predictive modeling, found that raising the tobacco sale age will significantly reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who start smoking; reduce smoking-caused deaths; and immediately improve the health of adolescents, young adults and young mothers who would be deterred from smoking. The report predicts that raising the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products to 21 will, over time, reduce the smoking rate by about 12 percent and smoking-related deaths by 10 percent.

Raising the legal tobacco sale age to 21 would:

- Delay the age when young people first begin using tobacco and reduce the risk that they will transition to regular or daily tobacco use
- Increase the age gap between adolescents initiating tobacco use and those who can legally provide them with tobacco products
- Make it more difficult for younger adolescents to pass themselves off as 21-year-olds than they would 18-year-olds
- Simplify identification checks for retailers, since many state drivers' licenses, including Massachusetts', indicate that a driver is under the age of 21.

**S.1218** would also prohibit the sale of tobacco items at retail outlets that sell pharmaceutical products. Pharmacies are a trusted source of health information and the sale of tobacco products is incongruous with the vital health care role that is played by pharmacies and pharmacists. Sale of tobacco in pharmacies sends a mixed message to consumers about the dangers of tobacco.

If enacted, **S.1218** will be a unifying and important component of a comprehensive tobacco control. Other parts of the country have enacted legislation increasing the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products to 21. In 2013, New York passed legislation which allowed municipalities to enact a higher minimum age for sale of tobacco products. As of January 1 2016, Hawaiian legislation was put into effect which required a minimum legal age of 21 for the purchase of tobacco products.

COBTH and its member hospitals thank you for this opportunity to express support for this important legislation and respectfully urge favorable action on **S.1218**. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Erwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Erwin  
Executive Director