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May 17, 2016

Speaker Robert A. DeLeo
Massachusetts House Of Representatives
Massachusetts State House, Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Speaker DeLeo:

On behalf of the Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals (COBTH) I would like to express our strong support in favor of **Senate Bill 2269**, 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 March 1, 2016 100 cities and communities in Massachusetts enacted local governance raising the legal minimum age to 21 including Boston in 2015.

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 and respiratory disease, among other health disorders, and costs 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.

SB2269 would also prohibit the sale of tobacco items at retail outlets that also 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 also sends a mixed message to consumers about the dangers of tobacco.

If enacted, **SB 2269** will be a unifying and important component of a comprehensive tobacco control. Already other parts of the country have enacted legislation increasing the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products to 21. In 2013 New York raised its minimum legal age and in 2015 Hawaii became the first U.S. state to enact legislation to raise its minimum legal age to 21 for the sale of tobacco products – that legislation came into effect on January 1st of this year.

COBTH and its member hospitals thank you for this opportunity to express support for this important legislation and respectfully urge favorable action on **SB 2269**. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Erwin".

John Erwin
Executive Director

CC:

Rep. Jeffrey Sánchez - House Chair, Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
Rep. Kate Hogan - House Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health