

House Finance Ways & Means Committee
March 9, 2017
Statement by Allyson Blandford
Director Advocacy & Government Affairs
March of Dimes

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 49 as it relates to the Governor's tobacco tax increase proposal. The March of Dimes supports the cigarette tax provision.

The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose volunteers and staff work to improve the health of infants and children by preventing birth defects, premature births and infant mortality. Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education and advocacy.

According to the Ohio Department of Health, in 2010 approximately 32% of women on Medicaid continued to smoke during their pregnancy. Women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely than nonsmokers to have a preterm or low birthweight baby. Prematurity is the leading cause of death in the first month of life. Developmental delays may include chronic respiratory problems, blindness or deafness. Exposure to secondhand smoke during pregnancy and after birth increase the risk of sudden infant death syndrome, a key contributor to infant mortality.

The Ohio Department of Health has also reported that maternal smoking increased the risk of admission to a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) by almost 20% and increased the length of stay. NICU care for an infant costs more than \$3,600 per night.

Increasing Ohio's tobacco tax from \$1.60/pack to \$2.25/pack or more will help smokers quit and help pregnant women stop smoking. ODH reports that in 2015, more than 1,000 Ohio infants died before their first birthday. The March of Dimes 2016 Premature Birth Report card rated Ohio a "C" due to the 10.3% rate of prematurity in the state.

Maternal smoking is a leading contributor of prematurity. A 2016 report by the Ohio Commission on Infant Mortality recommended the Ohio legislature raise the tax as a way to lower the state's high infant mortality rate. Governor Kasich continues to address infant mortality in the state and has included the tobacco tax as an effort to reduce maternal smoking.

We support raising the tax to address the health of all Ohioans and babies. The March of Dimes remains a resource and a partner in this conversation. Please contact us if you need any specific data or have questions or concerns.

Thank you for your consideration of our support.