



Dustin Holfinger
State Government Relations Director,
American Heart Association
Substitute HB 166 – Interested Party Testimony –
Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in response to the Senate version of Substitute HB 166.

Increasing the age of sale for tobacco products to 21 will help reduce tobacco use among youth and young adults – age groups when nearly all tobacco use begins and that are heavily targeted by the tobacco industry. Ninety-five percent of adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21, and tobacco companies spend \$9.4 billion a year – more than \$1 million every hour – to market their potentially deadly and addictive products, much of it aimed at young people – i.e. cotton candy flavored electronic smoking devices. Increasing the tobacco age of sale to 21 will help counter the industry’s relentless efforts to target young people. It will also help keep tobacco out of high schools, where younger teens often obtain tobacco products from older students.

A 2015 report by the National Academy of Medicine (previously called the Institute of Medicine) concluded that increasing the tobacco age of sale to 21 would, over time, significantly reduce the number of youth and young adults who start smoking, as well as smoking-caused deaths – it will also help, over time, decrease the Medicaid costs associated with illnesses attributed with this habit.

The American Heart Association applauds the Senate for its clear support for the Governor’s proposed increase in the legal age of sale for tobacco and other nicotine products, specifically electronic smoking devices in Ohio, as well as the House’s changes to the ORC’s definitions pertaining to these products. Those definitional changes are integral to cover future products in this realm. The changes found in the Senate’s version of the substitute bill – putting the retailers for the “vapor products” on the same level of licensure as their traditional tobaccos retail counterparts (sections 757.260 and 5743.61), as well as levying a tax on these products equal to their other-tobacco-product counterparts are extremely commendable and appreciated by the American Heart Association.

This committee and its colleagues in the Senate clearly felt the need to strengthen the language from its as-introduced version, which we appreciate. However, there is still one piece that we would ask you to consider adding via the omnibus amendment – the removal of youth penalties (found in ORC section 2151.87). This would ensure the penalties for underage sales do not keep an individual from future employment as well as potentially keep them from having transportation to and from a current job. Our suggested changes can be found in amendment SC 4990.



American
Heart
Association.

13 June 2019

As a scientifically-based organization, we are pleased to see the State of Ohio on the verge of potentially joining the 14 other states, 470 localities across the country, major corporations – including Walmart, Walgreens, and Rite Aid, and the 23 communities in our state in increasing the legal age of sale for these products.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our request. We truly believe our recommendations will help yield the outcome that is intended – a healthier Ohio.

While I am here, I would be remiss if I did not ask that this committee reconsider its position on the Healthy Food Financing Initiative. This is a program intended to support healthy food access in underserved communities in urban and rural low-and moderate-income areas. Ohio is third in the nation for food insecurity. This means that thousands of Ohio families are forced skip meals or eat less because they don't have access to or enough money to buy healthy food. Studies have shown that people who are food insecure suffer from more illnesses and poor health have a higher stroke risk and increased rates of diabetes and high blood pressure. We support this effort because ultimately, providing healthy food options to all Ohioans is a win for everyone in our state. In order to see a substantive impact on the health and wellbeing of Ohioans in greatest need of food access around the state, AHA and our partners, including the Finance Fund, the Diabetes Association, and the Ohio Grocers Association, are respectfully requesting no less than \$3M in GRF support across the upcoming FY2020-2021 biennium – it is currently funded at \$300,000. These funds will provide direct loans, in addition to grants, and/or forgivable loans to establish, renovate, and expand permanent facilities for the sale of healthy foods in communities currently underserved by these facilities.

I will now be happy to answer any questions you might have.