

Testimony Regarding Ohio Department of Health Provisions in HB166
Ohio Senate Finance Health & Medicaid Subcommittee
May 16, 2019

Chairman Hackett, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid. A good and healthy morning to you. My name is Dr. Teresa Long. I am a physician specialized in Preventive Medicine and served as Health Commissioner for Columbus for 15 years (plus a previous 16 years as Assistant Health Commissioner and Medical Director) before I retired at the end of 2017. I now serve as a Special Advisor for Community Engagement and Partnership at The Ohio State University College of Public Health. I speak to you today as a community member, a concerned physician and the Health Commissioner who lead the creation and implementation of the Tobacco21 (T21) ordinance in Columbus in 2016.

T21 is all about preventing nicotine addiction. As you know tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death in Ohio and the United States. And, as you likely know, Ohio's just released Health Value Dashboard reports that Ohio has one of the highest smoking rates in the country, 44th, placing us in the worst quartile for tobacco usage in the country and that worst quartile for smoking is the exact same quartile as those states with the worst population health in the nation. Our overall health value is 46th in the nation. If we do not meaningfully reduce our tobacco usage (and nicotine addiction) we will never improve the health of our Ohio workforce, our young residents and our entire population. (I would note that over 90% of adults who smoke began before the age of 21).

So, the Columbus story---We were faced, as are you, with the need to protect health and balance community interests and resources. We listened to advocates, concerned parties, looked at the factors that would actually make a difference and reduce smoking initiation. We learned that you cannot just change the 18 year old purchase age to a 21year threshold.

To have an impact, you must 1) educate businesses and the public, 2) have an accountability / enforcement process and 3) support such financially. Without such, it just wont work. There are states and multiple Ohio communities who are a part of this effort to save lives. We are proud of the Columbus Model and while it is too early to say we have lowered smoking initiation rates yet, I am confident that we will. We do know that Columbus retailers are not selling tobacco products to persons under the age of 21.

So I applaud our Governor, the Ohio Department of Health and our legislature for efforts to support the good health of Ohioans and I strongly encourage you to protect the health of our young people, our next generation, with meaningful T21 legislation with the inclusion of enforcement and funding. This will prevent smoking initiation and nicotine addiction, hence protect health, greatly reduce future health care costs and suffering, and improve the well-being of Ohio.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today and I would be happy to answer any questions.