



**Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
House Bill 96
Kezia Ofosu Atta, Director of Advocacy
American Lung Association, Ohio
June 3, 2025**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Kezia Ofosu Atta. I am the Director of Advocacy for the American Lung Association in Ohio. The Lung Association is the nation's oldest voluntary public health organization, with a mission to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy, and research.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 96. I am here today to join fellow advocates and urge the Ohio legislature to prioritize the health and lungs of Ohioans by raising our state's cigarette tax by \$1.50, reinstating Governor DeWine's lung health provisions in House Bill 96.

The Lung Association strongly supports an increase in the state's cigarette tax, which has not increased since 2015. We believe that this proven public health strategy is long overdue. Effective, science-based policies such as these lead to quit attempts and prevent youth initiation of tobacco products. Every 10% tax increase on cigarettes leads to a reduction in consumption by 4% among adults and 7% among youths, making it one of the most effective ways to reduce tobacco use, especially among the youth. In Ohio, 20.4% of high school students use tobacco products annually, and 3.3%, which is approximately 20,000 plus, smoke every year. Among this population, 18.8% use e-cigarettes. The middle school smoking rate is even more alarming, at 3.1%.

In our recently released State of Tobacco Control Report, Ohio received an "F" grade in the Tobacco Tax category. The grade is mainly due to the low cigarette tax and the lack of tax equalization across all tobacco products. HB 96 can correct this by increasing the cigarette tax and equalizing the tax to 42% of wholesale price for most tobacco

products, creating parity with the cigarette tax by not relying on volume but ideally 42% of wholesale for other tobacco products like it was in the as introduced House version.

Additionally, the Lung Association supported the vapor distribution license provision, which was not passed in the House version. This provision would have brought accountability to vaped tobacco product distributors, allowing for better enforcement of our state's tobacco regulations. The House's introduced version of HB 96 was a step in the right direction as it attempted to address youth tobacco initiation by addressing flavored vaped tobacco products, as we know that flavors are attractive to youth and used by the industry to lure kids to their products.

Unfortunately, the passed House version and the amended substitute version by the Senate Finance Committee did not include the provision to increase the cigarette tax and apply flavor restrictions on all tobacco products. The Lung Association urges the committee to reinstate the \$1.50 cigarette tax provision and extend the flavor restrictions to all tobacco products, as only addressing one product would create a loophole, leading consumers and youth to pursue other addictive flavored tobacco products such as little cigars or nicotine pouches, which are seeing a surge in use among our kids.

Tobacco use remains that tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Ohio and the nation. Diseases such as lung cancer, COPD, asthma, and stroke are all caused and irritated by the use and exposure to cigarettes and tobacco products. In fact, 33.5% of cancer deaths are attributed to smoking. Today, 1.381 million adult Ohioans smoke cigarettes, making up 15% of the population; and 20.4% of High School students use some form of tobacco products. Both rates are higher than the national average and we urge the Ohio legislature to support the Governor's recommended funding increase for the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program bringing funding to \$10 million, although we would also appreciate a stay at \$7.5 million. We currently only cover 7.8% of the \$132million federal recommendation. It is of interest to know that Big Tobacco spends approximately \$409.6 million annually, just in Ohio to advertise cigarette and tobacco products, appealing to youth and taking advantage of vulnerable communities – meaning for every \$1 the state spends to prevent tobacco addiction, the industry spends \$40 to hook the next generation.

Recent legislative developments in our neighbor states Indiana and Kentucky signals a paradigm shift in favor of increasing cigarette tax and other lung health protective

provisions. In April, Indiana passed a \$2 increase in their cigarette tax, bringing their total tax to \$3 per pack. The Kentucky legislature voted in March to put their kids ahead of tobacco by passing a tobacco retail licensure bill, protecting their next generation from exposure and addiction to nicotine products.

It is time for members of the Ohio legislature to protect their constituents from the dangers of tobacco, which kills approximately 20,000 people in Ohio annually. The American Lung Association supports strong tobacco prevention policies that are proven to reduce tobacco rates, and the lung health-centered provisions in the Governor's proposal that we are asking for them to be reinstated do just that, putting the health and lungs of Ohioans first.

Data Note: All data shared in this testimony is available in American Lung Association's [2025 State of Tobacco Control Ohio Report](#), except Cancer Deaths and Big Tobacco Advertisement Data that are sourced from the [Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids](#).