

Senate Finance Committee
Tuesday, June 9, 2015
Interested Party Testimony on HB64
Lily Berry

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Coley, and Ranking Minority Member Skindell, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB65.

I ask you to support strong tobacco prevention and cessation policies including increasing the cigarette tax by \$1.00 per pack. We know that regular, significant increases in the cigarette tax is one of the most effective ways to keep kids from starting to smoke and to help adults quit.

This year, 20,200 Ohioans will die due to their own smoking.

Today, while we are at this hearing, 55 Ohioans will die due their own smoking.

It was on January 11, 2011 that my dad was one of those 55 Ohioans who lost their life due to tobacco use.

My father, Kevin, was one of a kind. He was the most loving and genuine person I've ever met. Whether it was a spontaneous phone call just to say "I love you", or a friendly hug ending with his notorious "love you man", he never let a day go by without expressing how much you meant to him. He welcomed everyone with open arms, and even befriended those who turned their back on him. He accepted everyone for who they were, never passed judgement, and always gave the benefit of the doubt. His only enemy in life, was tobacco.

On January 1st, 2011, my dad was admitted into the neuro ICU unit at riverside hospital. After smoking 40+ years and up to 3 packs a day, he developed severe emphysema and a fierce smoker's cough. On New Year's Day, he greeted the year with his morning cigarette, upon where he coughed so hard he burst a blood vessel in his brain. He spent the next 11 days in the hospital battling ventilators, staph, pneumonia, and detoxification, while waiting for the blood in his brain to dissipate before further action. On the evening of January 11th, he died in my arms.

My father was 58 when he passed. He struggled with his addiction, giving every remedy a shot to quit. From cold turkey, to the patch, gum, and even hypnosis. None of them prevailed. Tobacco ended my parents inspiring marriage at 26 years. I was 18 when my father passed, and my brother was 15. He has missed too many milestones in our lives; from both my brother and I graduating high school, to just a couple of weeks ago when I graduated from The Ohio State University; grounds that he also stomped. Tobacco took my father's life within 11 days. But his life isn't the only thing - tobacco has also cheated my family from the memories and experiences with loved ones that we all live for.

I was not looking forward to standing up here today and speaking to you all. Other than my strong dislike for public speaking, I loathe talking about my father. I try my best to suppress and avoid reliving the pain I felt during those 11 days, and I knew getting up here today I was going to have to tear my walls down.

Although it may only be for a few short moments, I wouldn't wish this pain upon anyone. But I'm standing up here today with the ambition that I make some sort of impact on your decision. Because if sacrificing my time today prevents another daughter from having not father to walk her down the aisle on her wedding day, or another son from not having his father to coach him through his first time behind the wheel, or a family from experiencing Christmas morning without a father, then this pain I feel would be much more tolerable knowing that I can make a difference in innocent lives.

My life will never be the same because of tobacco use. You can ensure that fewer families don't experience what ours has. I ask the Senate to support increasing tobacco taxes to prevent the next generation from becoming addicted to this deadly product, and to prevent families from experiencing the suffering of one of their loved ones being among the 20,200 Ohioans who will lose their life to tobacco this year.

Please support the Governor's proposal to increase the cigarette tax by \$1.00 per pack. By supporting the tax increase at that level, you will be keeping 65,000 youth from becoming adult smokers and helping 73,100 adults quit. You will be saving these families from the heartbreak that I had to experience.