



April 2, 2014

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara  
Chair, House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare  
Rhode Island State House  
Room 101  
Providence, RI 02903

**Re: H7759 – An ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES - CHILDREN**

**Purpose:** This act would increase the minimum age to buy and sell tobacco products from eighteen (18) years to twenty-one (21) years.

**Statement in Support:** The American Lung Association in Rhode Island supports this bill. We are committed to reducing the prevalence of smoking in Rhode Island by making smoking inconvenient and expensive. This legislation helps achieve this by increasing the purchase age for tobacco products.

Data shows that 95% of US adult smokers start smoking before they turn 21. Many smokers transition to regular use during the ages of 18-21.

This legislation would help prevent more youth from succumbing to an addiction that could cost them their lives. In Rhode Island, 1,500 people die every year from their own smoking.

Studies show that as much as 60% of underage smokers do not purchase their cigarettes from retailers but instead get their cigarettes from "social sources" such as older friends who smoke. Raising the purchase age to 21 will further limit such social sources for our children.

***"Raising the legal minimum age for cigarette purchaser to 21 could gut our key young adult market (17-20) where we sell about 25 billion cigarettes and enjoy a 70 percent market share."***

***--Philip Morris report, January 21, 1986***

***"If a man has never smoked by age 18, the odds are 3-to-1 that he never will. By age 21, the odds are 20-to-1."***

***--R.J. Reynolds, September 10, 1982***

The fact is that the tobacco industry has a long and disturbing history of luring youth to their addictive products. Prior to the Master Settlement Agreement in 1998, the tobacco industry promoted their products directly to kids through advertising and marketing. While the tobacco settlement put in place tough restrictions to stop tobacco companies from directing advertising and marketing to kids, the tobacco companies drastically increased their advertising and marketing budgets and shifted their focus to college kids, the 18-24 year old age group.

***"...the root cause of the smoking epidemic is also evident: the tobacco industry aggressively markets and promotes lethal and addictive products, and continues to recruit youth and young adults as new consumers of these products."***

***--2014 U.S. Surgeon General's Report,  
The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress***

New York City became the first major U.S. city to raise the sale age to 21 in November, 2013. Hawaii County, HI followed that same month.

Rhode Island has a proud history of strong tobacco control policies that have helped reduce smoking rates to record low levels. But, tobacco companies continue to look for new "replacement smokers." This legislation, combined with a well-funded tobacco control program, a high tobacco tax, strong public messaging campaigns and tools to help smokers quit, will help further reduce smoking rates in Rhode Island.

**The American Lung Association in Rhode Island supports the passage of this public health legislation and urges its enactment into law.**

For more information contact: Karina Holyoak Wood, Public Policy Director, American Lung Association of Rhode Island: 401-533-5179 or [kwood@lungne.org](mailto:kwood@lungne.org)