

Good Evening Chairman Conley and all members of the Senate Committee on Finance,

My name is Jennifer Wall and I am the Director of Health Education and Public Policy at the American Lung Association in Rhode Island.

The American Lung Association strongly supports S2121 which would increase the tax on Little Cigars and dedicate 25 percent of the additional tax revenue to fund the RI Department of Health's tobacco cessation programs and services and we applaud Senator Miller for sponsoring this bill.

Rhode Island can be proud of our successful tobacco control policies that have led to the lowest youth cigarette smoking rate in the nation (5.7%), but we must also face the reality that one in four high school students are using **any** type of tobacco product, such as little cigars, hookah, smokeless tobacco, cigars and e-cigarettes. With nearly one quarter of our high school students still using some type of tobacco product, it's essential that Rhode Island take further steps to reduce all tobacco use – which remains the number one cause of preventable death and disease in Rhode Island and the nation.

Keeping the price of tobacco products high is the single most effective public health strategy to prevent youth tobacco use and reduce adult smoking rates. Rhode Island's current cigarette tax is \$4.25 per pack, the third-highest cigarette state excise tax in the nation, yet many Little Cigars that are sold in packs of 20 and are very similar to cigarettes in size and content are taxed at a far lesser rate (at 80% of wholesale price) and are consequently far cheaper than cigarettes (*show & tell with little cigar and cigarettes demo's*). The retail price of a pack of 20 cigarettes in Rhode Island is between \$8.00 – 9.00, whereas the retail price of a pack of 20 Little Cigars is between \$2.00 - \$3.00. Little Cigars are being used as cheap cigarette substitutes by youth.

In our neighboring state of Massachusetts, Little Cigars are taxed at \$3.51 per 20 cigars.

Rhode Island is currently not only losing valuable tobacco tax revenue by permitting Little Cigars to be taxed at a lesser rate than cigarettes, but these cheap cigarette-substitutes are undermining our state's effective youth tobacco prevention measures. The American Lung Association urges you to approve this legislation to increase the tax on Little Cigars and improve the health of Rhode Island's kids.