



TOWN OF AVON

Sent via E-mail

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March 29, 2019

Senator Kevin Witkos
Senate Republican Office
LOB Room 3400
Hartford, CT 06106

Representative Leslee Hill
LOB Room 4200
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

RE : **R.B. No. 7200 An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Vapor Products to Persons under Age Twenty-One**

Dear Senator Witkos and Representative Hill:

The Town of Avon **strongly supports** Raised Bill No. 7200, "*An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Vapor Products to Persons under Age Twenty-One*," which would increase the minimum legal age (MLA) to purchase these dangerous products from eighteen to twenty-one statewide. While these products pose health risks to all residents, individuals under the age of twenty-one are particularly vulnerable.

Tobacco use continues to be the leading cause of preventable death in the nation and is a known cause of cancer, heart disease and respiratory diseases.ⁱ Additionally, nicotine, a component of traditional tobacco products and e-cigarettes, is highly addictive and often serves as a gateway to other drugs, especially for youth, an age group that is particularly susceptible to nicotine's addictive qualities. While high taxes on tobacco products, existing smoke-free laws, and comprehensive tobacco cessation programs have proven to reduce tobacco use and save lives, we feel that further action should be taken to prevent youth and adolescent access, and addiction, to tobacco, nicotine and e-cigarette products.ⁱⁱ

As I am sure you are aware, the General Assembly considered taking action on this important public health issue during the 2018 legislative session. Unfortunately, no action was taken last year and, in response, several Connecticut municipalities began exploring the possibility of adopting ordinances that would raise the MLA locally. While the protection of resident health and safety is a critical function of a municipality, the adoption of comprehensive statewide legislation on this issue, rather than a patchwork of local ordinances, is essential to ensuring the health of all Connecticut youth, regardless of the Town in which they live. Further, as a practical matter, in a time when state government constantly requests that municipalities regionalize and establish practices that prevent unnecessary duplications of effort, the state should take the lead in addressing this matter and prevent 169 communities from spending the time, effort, and money to individually legislate this issue.

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The adoption of R.B. No. 7200 is critical to improving the health of Connecticut's youth, as the initial age of tobacco use is directly linked to the likelihood of continued use and addiction in adulthood. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reports that approximately 95 percent of adult smokers began smoking before the age of twenty-one.ⁱⁱⁱ Alternatively, adults who have not tried smoking by their early twenties will most likely never smoke. Even cigarette manufacturers agree with these statistics and have used them to inform their marketing strategies for decades. In 1982, a researcher from R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company reported that *"If a man has never smoked by age 18, the odds are three-to-one he never will. By age 24, the odds are twenty-to-one."*^{iv}

Additionally, delaying legal access to tobacco products will not only protect youth aged 18-21, it will also help to keep these products of our schools, as high school students who have reached the MLA often serve as a social source of tobacco for their underage classmates.^v This is especially important as DHHS reports that about 75 percent of adult smokers first try smoking before the age of 18.^{vi}

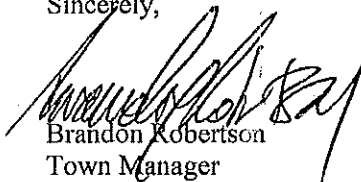
While data on the long-term benefits of legislation limiting youth and young adult access to tobacco and e-cigarette products, particularly raising the MLA, are limited, the movement to increase the minimum drinking age to twenty-one in the 1980s offers us an understanding of the likely public health benefits that a raised MLA can offer. In particular, raising the minimum drinking age has been associated with reduced alcohol consumption among youth and young adults, and has resulted in fewer alcohol-related crashes among this age group.^{vii}

In comparison, it is likely that raising the MLA will significantly reduce the number of young people who begin smoking at all; reduce deaths related to smoking; and improve the overall health of the adolescent and youth population.^{viii} These hypotheses are reflected in data available from states and cities that have already implemented legislation to raise the MLA, such as California, New York City and Chicago.^{ix}

The Town of Avon respectfully urges you to support Raised Bill No. 7200, a comprehensive piece of legislation that will prevent adolescents and young adults from accessing these dangerous products in the short term, and will improve overall public health over the long term.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (860) 409-4300 with questions.

Sincerely,



Brandon Robertson
Town Manager

Cc: President Pro Tempore, Martin Looney
Majority Leader, Bob Duff
Senate Minority Leader, Leonard Fasano
Speaker of the House, Joe Aresimowicz
Majority Leader, Matt Ritter
Minority Leader, Themis Klarides

ⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21. (n.d.). Retrieved January 2, 2019, from <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0376.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center of Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014.

^{iv} RJ Reynolds, "Estimated Change in Industry Trend Following Federal Excise Tax Increase," September 10, 1982, Bates Number 513318387/8390.

^v Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine), *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2015.

^{vi} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014.

^{vii} Wagenaar, AC and Toomey, TL, "Effects of Minimum Drinking Age Laws: Review and Analyses of the Literature from 1960 to 2000," *J Stud Alcohol*, Supplement No. 14: 206-225, 2002; Hedlund, JH, Ulmer, RG, and Preusser, DF, "Determine Why There are Fewer Young Alcohol-Impaired Drivers, DOT HS 809 348, Final Report," U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, September 2001.

^{viii} Institute of Medicine, 2015.

^{ix} Increasing the Minimum Legal Sale Age for Tobacco Products to 21