

March 2, 2021

CT General Assembly, Appropriations Committee

Legislative Office Building 2700

Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony of the American Lung Association in Connecticut Regarding Raised House Bill 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Sandra Ribeiro, and I am speaking on behalf of the American Lung Association. I am a public health professional and dedicate much of my personal time to organizations working to help people breathe – such an essential action to life which many of us take for granted. There is nothing that more negatively affects one’s health than smoking. I see the negative health effects of smoking each day. That is why I strongly encourage the committee to commit to investing in tobacco cessation and prevention programming in the state of Connecticut for FY22, FY23 and beyond.

Even in 2021, far too many Connecticut residents remain addicted to tobacco—a deadly product that not only cuts lives short, but causes diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the third leading cause of death in America. As someone who sees what COPD patients deal with on a regular basis, I can tell you that this is a disease that cruelly robs its victims of their quality of life by making it so difficult to breathe that performing even normal daily activities becomes a problem. At this time, there is no cure for COPD; but that doesn’t mean we don’t have the power to prevent its onset. Between 80 and 90 percent of all COPD cases are caused by smoking.

Connecticut can and must do more to help smokers quit and to prevent a new generation from getting hooked on nicotine through cigarettes and other emerging unregulated tobacco products. Imagine what the future would be like with significantly fewer people suffering and dying from lung diseases and other tobacco-caused diseases? How many more mothers and fathers will be there to see their children grow up, graduate from college, get married, start families of their own and be a part of their grandchildren’s lives. I know you have many difficult budgetary considerations to make, but I ask you to consider

funding tobacco prevention and cessation programs despite Governor Lamont's proposed budget. These programs can have a tremendous impact that, to most all of us, is simply priceless.

We need Connecticut to make a long-term commitment and investment to reduce health care costs and to save lives by funding tobacco control programs. At a time when COVID-19 has only highlighted the need to help people quit tobacco and prevent others from starting, we know that this investment could make a real impact for our state and its residents. Too many people think this battle against tobacco is a thing of the past, but I see evidence to the contrary every day. If the Governor's proposed budget were to go into effect, Connecticut would be fighting the millions that the tobacco industry spends in the state each year with nothing. In that fight, everyone loses.

I thank you for your time and consideration of my request. Thank you for your work on behalf of Connecticut residents.

Sandra Ribeiro, MPH

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