

March 2, 2025

Dear Senate Labor & Commerce Chair Bjorkman and Committee Members,

My name is Beverly Wooley. I've been an Alaskan resident for almost 65 years and currently live in Big Lake. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you in favor of Senate Bill 24.

I had the privilege of working in public health in Alaska for over 30 years. I'm currently retired but formerly served as the Director of the Division of Public Health for the State of Alaska and prior to that as the Director of the Department of Health and Human Services for the Municipality of Anchorage.

Your help is needed to keep our young people healthy by protecting them from tobacco use. I am writing to ask for your support to:

- tax e-cigarette products,
- back a strong tobacco prevention program and protect the Tobacco Use Education and Cessation Fund by ensuring stable and sufficient funding to meet the program's long-term goals, and
- raise the minimum age in Alaska to buy, sell or possess tobacco and electronic smoking products from age 19 to 21.

Because tobacco use is most often established during adolescence, it is imperative that we take all actions necessary to prevent youth from ever initiating tobacco use. Once started, it's an extremely difficult habit to kick. Prevention is really the key.

As a public health professional, I saw firsthand how the existing state tobacco enforcement program was effective in reducing the sale of tobacco products to minors. Raising the age to 21 will further enhance this strategy. I also saw how increasing the cost of cigarettes through increased taxes was effective in significantly decreasing cigarette smoking among AK youth.

There is no silver bullet to prevent youth from tobacco use and it will take a combination of strategies to do so. This bill is a crucial step in preventing youth tobacco use. Please, don't wait - now is the time to strengthen our protection of young people by passing SB24. Thank you!

Sincerely,

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