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March 12, 2025

The Honorable Jesse Bjorkman
Chair
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Beltz 105
120 4th St
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: AKSAM's Support for HB49/SB24, Tobacco/Nicotine/E-Cig Age; E-Cig Tax

Dear Chair Bjorkman:

On behalf of the Alaska Society of Addiction Medicine (AKSAM), the leading medical specialty society representing physicians and other clinicians in Alaska who treat addiction, we write today to express our support for HB49/SB24. This important legislation would strengthen youth tobacco prevention efforts, including raising the minimum purchasing age to 21. These provisions of HB49/SB24 are evidence-based measures that will ultimately reduce youth tobacco use.

AKSAM supports an approach to tobacco prevention that aims to reduce youth use of harmful products and safeguard public health. The provisions included within HB49/SB24 meet these aims. Indeed, while overall tobacco usage is declining, national estimates indicate that e-cigarettes were the most used tobacco product among middle and high school aged students in 2024.¹ As addiction specialists, we know the impact that tobacco use at early ages can have on future dependency. Additionally, we know that e-cigarettes are aggressively marketed to the youth

¹ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2025). *Results from the Annual National Youth Tobacco Survey*.
<https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/youth-and-tobacco/results-annual-national-youth-tobacco-survey>

demographic.² As such, we must counter by pursuing policy measures that reduce the likelihood of youth introduction to products like e-cigarettes.

Despite some favorable national trends, Alaska is unfortunately ranked highly among U.S. states in regard to higher-than-average youth smoking and tobacco usage rates.³ In turn, we must disincentivize youth usage of tobacco products by raising the age for purchase and possession to 21. It is in Alaska's best interest to put our best foot forward in protecting the health of our youth and investing in their future success. HB49/SB24 would take concrete steps in the right direction to discourage youth tobacco product use.

For the reasons stated above, we support HB49/SB24 and urge all members of the committee to support its advancement. Thank you for your consideration of our prospective. Please contact our leadership should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Betty K. Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Betty K. Anderson, MD
Vice President, Alaska Society of Addiction Medicine

CC: The Honorable Kelly Merrick
The Honorable Elvi Gray-Jackson
The Honorable Forrest Dunbar
The Honorable Robert Yundt

² Addiction Prevention Coalition. (2021). *Marketing to The Youth of America: How E-Cigarette Companies Target Young People*. APCBham.

<https://apcbham.org/marketing-to-the-youth-of-america-how-e-cigarette-companies-target-young-people/>

³

American Lung Association. (2024). *Tobacco trends brief: Rates by State*. Tobacco Trends Brief: Rates By State | American Lung Association. <https://www.lung.org/research/trends-in-lung-disease/tobacco-trends-brief/rates-by-state>

March 10, 2025

Representative Ky Holland
Alaska Legislature
State Capitol Room 418
Juneau AK, 99801
rep.ky.holland@akleg.gov

Co-Chairs Foster, Josephson and Schrage
House Finance Committee
State Capitol, Room 519
Juneau, AK 99801
House.Finance@akleg.gov

Dear Rep. Holland, Co-Chairs Foster, Josephson and Schrage, and members of the House Finance Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Launch Alaska to express our strong support for House Bill 34 which would establish the Alaska Innovation Council. Launch Alaska's mission is to catalyze rapid innovation that strengthens energy, transportation, and industrial systems. The Alaska Innovation Council's goal of accelerating the growth of emerging industries and diversification of Alaska's economy is directly aligned with this mission.

By fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, this bill aims to inform public policy and leverage state, public and private resources. The outcome will be measured by diversification of the economy and growth of emerging sector GDP, new business formation and investment capital, job creation, retention of Alaskans, and attracting new business and their associated jobs to Alaska. At Launch Alaska we know that startup companies have the ability to catalyze economic growth for entire regions of the state. Having an aligned vision and goals for the State of Alaska to support these companies is critical for Alaska's competitiveness in the global economy.

Additionally, we would like to suggest a change to the bill as it currently stands in the Committee Substitute for House Bill 34 (Labor & Commerce). We suggest the following change in the bill text (in yellow):

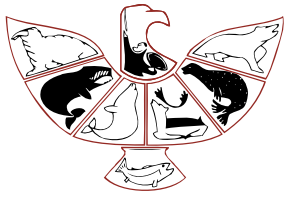
- (3) seven members appointed by the governor who are experienced entrepreneurs, experienced investors, engaged in emerging industry operations in the state, or engaged in a growth business in the state; the members appointed under this paragraph must include
- (C) one member who is experienced and active in **angel** investing;

This change would open up this seat to allow different types of early-stage investment expertise on the Council, including venture capital, crowdfunding, and more. We believe this better reflects the broad suite of funding options for early-stage companies, allowing for well-rounded decision making that is informed by private markets.

Sincerely,



Penny Gage
Chief Policy & Partnerships Officer
Launch Alaska
2550 Denali Street, Suite 706
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
penny.gage@launchalaska.com



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

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February 28, 2025

The Honorable Sara Hannan
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol Building, Room 501
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: Support for Increasing the Minimum Age for Purchasing Tobacco Products

Dear Representative Hannan,

The Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)¹ writes in support of House Bill 49, which would increase the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products from 19 to 21, aligning Alaska state law with the federal minimum age for tobacco sales.

In 1992, Congress passed the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration Reorganization Act (P.L. 102-321), including section 1926, also known as the Synar Amendment. Under the Synar Amendment, states were required to enact and enforce laws prohibiting tobacco product sales and distribution to individuals under 18 or risk losing up to 10% of their Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Services Block Grant (SUBG) funds.² Subsequently, Congress passed superseding legislation in 2019, the Tobacco to 21 Act (P.L. 116-94), increasing the federal minimum age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21. The SUBG provides funding for substance abuse treatment and prevention services across Alaska. Ensuring the continuity of these services, including tobacco and nicotine use prevention and cessation services, is critical to the health and well-being of all Alaskans.

According to the 2024 National Youth Tobacco Survey, electronic cigarettes were the most commonly reported tobacco products used among middle and high school students nationally, followed by nicotine patches.³ Between 2015 and 2019, youth e-cigarette use in Alaska increased significantly from 18% to 26%, reflecting the growing need for legislation and resources to support our youth.⁴

¹ Established in 1968, ANHB's mission is to promote the spiritual, physical, mental, social, and cultural well-being and pride of Alaska Native people. ANHB is the statewide voice on Alaska Native health issues for the Alaska Tribal Health System, which is comprised of Tribes/Tribal Health Organizations that serve all 229 Tribes and over 188,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people throughout the Alaska. As the statewide advocacy organization, ANHB supports achieving effective consultation and communication with state and federal agencies on matters of concern.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Programmatic Requirements for the Synar Program*, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Accessed February 2025, <https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/learn/tobacco-vaping/synar/requirements>.

³ Jamal A, Park-Lee E, Birdsey J, et al. *Tobacco Product Use Among Middle and High School Students – National Youth Tobacco Survey*, United States, 2024. MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report 2024; 73:917-924. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7341a2>

⁴ Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) 2015-2019.

ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

ALEUTIAN PRIBILOF
ISLANDS ASSOCIATION

ARCTIC SLOPE
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

BRISTOL BAY AREA
HEALTH CORPORATION

CHICKALOON VILLAGE
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

CHUGACHMIUT

COPPER RIVER
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

COUNCIL OF ATHABASCAN
TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS

EASTERN ALEUTIAN TRIBES

KARLUK IRA
TRIBAL COUNCIL

KENAITZE INDIAN TRIBE

KETCHIKAN
INDIAN COMMUNITY

KODIAK AREA
NATIVE ASSOCIATION

MANILAQ ASSOCIATION

METLAKATLA INDIAN
COMMUNITY

MT. SANFORD
TRIBAL CONSORTIUM

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF EKLUTNA

NATIVE VILLAGE OF EYAK

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF TYONEK

NINILCHIK
TRADITIONAL COUNCIL

NORTON SOUND
HEALTH CORPORATION

SELDOVIA VILLAGE TRIBE

SOUTHCENTRAL
FOUNDATION

SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL
HEALTH CONSORTIUM

TANANA CHIEFS CONFERENCE

YAKUTAT TLINGIT TRIBE

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM
HEALTH CORPORATION

VALDEZ NATIVE TRIBE

Raising the minimum age for tobacco sales is an important step in addressing adolescent tobacco use in Alaska and preventing future tobacco-related illnesses and deaths.

Over the past few decades, significant progress has been made in reducing adolescent cigarette smoking, but the youth e-cigarette pandemic has the potential to stall or reverse this progress. In 2015, a report by the Institute of Medicine found that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to nicotine addiction, and raising the minimum age to purchase tobacco, nicotine, and vaping products to 21 would help to prevent initiation of tobacco use by adolescents and young adults, preventing an estimated 223,000 deaths among people born between 2000 and 2019.⁵

House Bill 49 prioritizes protecting the health of Alaska's youth from what could be a lifelong nicotine addiction and saving lives by reducing tobacco-related deaths. Furthermore, this legislation supports the Healthy Alaskans 2030 initiative, the State and Tribal health improvement plan, to achieve their public health objective to reduce adolescent tobacco use in Alaskan communities.⁶ Lastly, we cannot continue to risk access to full federal funding for critical substance abuse treatment and prevention services. To ensure this essential funding stream continues, we support House Bill 49 and state alignment with the federal minimum age to purchase tobacco products.

ANHB appreciates the opportunity to share our comments and support efforts that reduce youth access to tobacco products, promoting the health of Alaskan communities. If you or your staff have any comments or questions about our letter, please contact ANHB at anhb@anhb.org or via telephone at (907) 729-7510.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W F Smith".

Chief William F. Smith, Chairman
Alaska Native Health Board
Tribally-Elected Leader of the Valdez Native Tribe

CC: House.Finance@akleg.gov

⁵ Institute of Medicine. *Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products*. National Academies Press (US), 23 July 2015. doi:10.17226/18997

⁶ State Health Improvement Plan. *Healthy Alaskans 2030 Priority Health Topics and Health Objectives*. Healthy Alaskans 2030. Accessed February 2025, <https://www.healthyalaskans.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HA2030-Objectives.pdf>



February 26, 2025

The Honorable Representative Sara Hannan
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Hannan,

On behalf of the Mat-Su Health Foundation and its Board of Directors, I am writing to express support for Senate Bill 49 to align state law with federal statute by raising the minimum age for all tobacco products to 21 and to tax e-cigarette products just as is done with other tobacco products.

Adolescents perceive e-cigarettes as safer than regular cigarettes, but it is a myth that these products are safe or that they are a cessation tool. They are the opposite—they are a grooming tool, grooming kids to accept, like, and become dependent on smoking and nicotine. Recent research indicates that adolescents and teens who try e-cigs are much more likely than other youth to progress to traditional cigarettes. In fact, a 2015 National Institutes of Health report showed that 9th graders who used e-cigs were over three times more likely to start using combustible tobacco products than those who didn't use e-cigs. Here in Alaska, in 2017, data from the High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed that 15.7 percent of high school students that currently used electronic vapor products and in 2019 it increased to 26.1.

The vaping industry is protecting its business interests by pushing the belief that e-cigarettes are safer than regular cigarettes, have little health risk to the user or those exposed to second-hand emissions, and can help people quit smoking. There is no solid proof of these claims. One of the reports the industry has cited in the past was based on a study in England that has now come under scrutiny because it was conducted in part by researchers being paid by the vaping industry. The editors of the journal that initially published the report issued a warning alongside the article stating there was a potential conflict of interest. Yet, Public Health England refused to declare this warning when they announced the results of the flawed study to journalists. According to the renowned medical journal "The Lancet," health experts say that the major conclusion of the report was based on "an extraordinarily flimsy foundation."

Higher prices due to higher taxes are key to youth tobacco use prevention. Numerous studies in peer-reviewed journals have documented that higher prices for e-cigarettes correlate to lowered consumption, particularly among youth.

We thank you for introducing this important legislation to protect Alaska's youth from what often becomes a lifelong addiction.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ripley
President and Chief Executive Officer



TESTIMONY – House Labor & Commerce– HB 49 (February 17th at 3:15 pm)
Teresa Wrobel, Program Specialist for Policy & Advocacy

- For the record, I am Teresa Wrobel, Program Specialist for Policy & Advocacy at the Alaska Children's Trust.
- I am testifying in support of House Bill 49 which addresses the minimum purchase age and consistent taxing of tobacco products, including vaping products. Alaska Children's Trust believes in a future where Alaska's children, youth and families have the knowledge, skills, supports, and resources they need to thrive. Consistent with this vision, we support policies that promote the health and wellbeing of Alaska's children and youth, including policies targeted at reducing underage use of tobacco products.
- House Bill 49 supports the reduction in underage tobacco usage by aligning state law with federal statute, raising the minimum purchase age for all tobacco products from 19 to 21. Additionally HB49 establishes a sales tax for e-cigarette products, also commonly known as vapes, making the tax on vaping products consistent with taxes on other tobacco products in the state.
- Tax policies and age restrictions on purchases are policies associated with reducing underage use of tobacco products.
- According to KIDS COUNT 2024, 17% of Alaska high school students reported having used a vape in the past month. In 2022, vapes were the most used nicotine product by youth.
- Limiting access to youth through targeted taxation is a policy choice that is currently implemented in Alaska for other substances, including cigarettes and alcohol. Both cigarette smoking and use of alcohol have consistently declined since the introduction of taxes on these specific items. Alaska's last peak in underage alcohol use was in 2017.
- And research in other states has demonstrated that increased prices on e-cigarette products through taxes has resulted in a lower rate of use among youth.
- The policy changes in House Bill 49 would promote safe behaviors in Alaska's youth, increasing youth health and wellbeing.
- We encourage your support of House Bill 49. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.