



Alaska Native Health Board

THE VOICE OF ALASKA TRIBAL HEALTH SINCE 1968

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February 28, 2024

The Honorable Gary Stevens
Alaska Senate
State Capitol Building, Room 519
Juneau AK, 99801

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

Dear Senator Stevens,

The Alaska Native Health Board (ANHB)¹ writes in support of Senate Bill 89, 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 2019, Congress passed the Tobacco to 21 Act (H.R. 2411) into federal law, increasing the federal minimum age for the sale of tobacco products to 21. Under the Synar Amendment to the 1992 Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration Reorganization Act (P.L. 102-321), states have three years to come into compliance with laws that prevent tobacco sales to individuals under 21 or risk losing up to 10% of their Substance Abuse and Prevention Treatment Block Grant (SABG)². The SABG provides funding for substance abuse treatment and prevention services across Alaska, ensuring the continuity of these services is critical to the health and well-being of all Alaskans.

According to the Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 26% of all Alaskan high school students used e-cigarettes in 2019³. 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

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. *About the Synar Amendment and Program*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Accessed May 2024, <https://www.samhsa.gov/synar/about-synar>.

³ ³ Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data, 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

MANILLAQ ASSOCIATION

METLAKATLA INDIAN
COMMUNITY

MT. SANFORD
TRIBAL CONSORTIUM

NATIVE VILLAGE
OF EKLUKNA

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

purchase tobacco and vaping 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. ⁴

Senate Bill 89 addresses 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 communities⁵. Lastly, it is essential to ensure Alaska continues to receive full funding for critical substance abuse treatment and prevention services.

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". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

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

CC: House.Labor.And.Commerce@akleg.gov

⁴ 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

⁵ State Health Improvement Plan. *Healthy Alaskans 2030 Priority Health Topics and Health Objectives*. Healthy Alaskans 2030. Accessed May 2024, <https://www.healthyalaskans.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HA2030-Objectives.pdf>