

**STATEMENT OF
Rolando A. Andrew, Chief Executive Officer
Breathe DC Inc.
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Chairperson Vincent Gray
DC COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH FY 2021 BUDGET REQUEST &
DC DEPARTMENT OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FY 2021 BUDGET REQUEST**

June 5, 2020

Chairperson Gray and Members of the Committee on Health. I am Rolando Andrew, the Chief Executive Officer for Breathe DC. Breathe DC's mission is to ensure that every breath counts by promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing lung disease, through advocacy, education, and program services, especially in communities affected by health disparities. Our office is located in ward 8. Breathe DC also serves as an active member organization of the DC Tobacco Free Coalition and is the managing agent of the DC Asthma Coalition.

Request for Tobacco Control Funding:

The harm caused by cigarette smoking is devastating. It is the only product that if used as intended, will kill. Each year more than 700 adults over 35 year's old die in the District as a result of tobacco related illness and disease.

Breathe DC urges the Committee on Health to continue funding the District's tobacco control programs at the \$1.9 million - the level recommended by the Mayor's budget. The funding will give the District an opportunity to reduce the smoking rate below 20%, and make a significant impact on driving down the millions of dollars spent on the annual healthcare expenditures caused by tobacco in the District. The health

consequences of smoking are numerous, including pre-mature deaths, heart attacks, lung cancer, diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma attacks and other health problems.

Request for Asthma Funding:

Asthma continues to be a major health problem in the District. It affects almost 20,000 children and 52,000 adults in DC. Asthma is the leading cost of emergency room visits for children at a rate of 42%. The total cost to the District, including productivity losses due to morbidity, mortality, and incremental number of days lost from work and school, is estimated to be more than \$60 million.

Breathe DC calls for the District to invest \$1 million for a comprehensive campaign to address the asthma epidemic. Funding will support the DC Asthma Coalition's (DCAC) Strategic Action Plan to work to end the devastating effects of this dreadful disease. Specifically, funding will enable the coalition to implement a series of structured public health interventions to mitigate the impact of asthma in the District of Columbia.

DCAC has four major foci:

- Reduce disparities in asthma prevalence rates
- Reduce emergency room visits caused by pediatric asthma
- Reduce school absences caused by pediatric asthma
- Implement sustainable interventions to reduce the District's asthma rate by using evidence-based policy, systems, and environmental approaches.

We thank you for your commitment and unwavering support to a healthier Washington, DC and encourage DC residents to Quit smoking and adopting a healthy lifestyle.