



Testimony of Breathe DC Inc.
Janille Thompson, MS, Health Educator
Judiciary and Health and Human Services Joint Public Hearing
B21-152: The Prohibition Against Selling Tobacco Products to Individuals Under 21
Amendment of 2015
July 7, 2016

Good Afternoon Chairperson Alexander, Chairperson McDuffie and members of the Committee of the Judiciary and the Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Janille Thompson, a program health educator for Breathe DC and a resident of Ward 7. 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. I currently work on our East of the River Project, which focuses on cessation services for wards 7 and 8. Breathe DC's CEO Rolando Andrew is the chairperson of the DC Tobacco Free Coalition, and our organization is the managing agent of the DC Asthma Coalition. I am here to provide testimony in support of **B21-152: The Prohibition Against Selling Tobacco Products to Individuals Under 21 Amendment of 2015**.

SOCIAL

Research shows that adolescent smokers use peers as a common way to obtain tobacco products. Underage youth and teens ages 15 through 17 are most likely to receive tobacco from students or co-workers that are above the minimum legal age of access. Raising the sale of tobacco products from age 18 to 21 will make the direct purchase from a social source more difficult.¹ While older youth smokers are more likely to attempt to purchase their own cigarettes, they also become major suppliers for youth that rely on receiving tobacco from others.² In addition, there are now more 18 and 19 year olds in high school who can legally purchase tobacco and have daily contact with underage smokers.³ According to a recent report in the American Journal of



Preventative Medicine, about 75% of American adults and 70% of cigarette smokers favor increasing the tobacco purchase to age 21.⁴

ENVIRONMENTAL

Not only will youth ages 18-21 be able to give cigarettes to underage adolescents, they will also be major contributors to second hand smoke. Second hand smoke is both the smoke that results from the burning end of tobacco products and the smoke exhaled from a smoker.^{5,6,7} Breathing in second hand smoke can be extremely harmful to one's health, and can contribute to a heart attack or stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):

- Second hand smoke causes approximately 34,000 deaths from coronary heart disease among nonsmokers in the US.
- Annually, secondhand smoke exposure causes more than 8,000 deaths from stroke.
- Breathing in secondhand smoke interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase a person's risk of having a heart attack.
- In 2013 the CDC National Youth Tobacco Survey revealed almost half (48%) of U.S. teens reported being exposed to secondhand smoke which can put them at risk for asthma, lung infection and ear disease.

Breathe DC strongly supports raising the legal age limit to purchase tobacco products from age 18 to 21. We urge the council to take action and adopt **B21-152: The Prohibition Against Selling Tobacco Products to Individuals Under 21 Amendment of 2015**. As a result of this action, our teens will live healthier and more productive lives. Thank you for holding this hearing and for your interest in improving the health of our youth.



References

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