



Testimony to the Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee

In Support of SB233

From Bridget McCandless MD, President/CEO

The Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City was created in 2003 and seeks to provide leadership, advocacy and resources to eliminate barriers and promote quality health for uninsured and underserved. Our grantmaking focuses on safety net, mental health, and healthy lifestyles in six counties in the Kansas City-area, including Allen, Johnson, and Wyandotte Counties in Kansas.

When we consider barriers to health, tobacco rises to the top as a key public health concern. Smoking significantly increases the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and death from chronic obstructive lung disease. Appropriately so, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called tobacco "the single most important preventable risk to human health in developed countries and an important cause of premature death worldwide."

Tobacco use exacts a heavy toll on Kansas residents, where 10.2% of Kansas high school students currently smoke, earning Kansas the 15th highest youth smoking rate and resulting in 61,000 Kansas kids dying prematurely. Perhaps most alarming, 2,900 Kansas kids become smokers each year.

When we consider strategies to reduce the public health burden of tobacco, increased tobacco pricing stands out as a critical strategy. Empirical evidence strongly demonstrates that increased pricing decreases demand for cigarettes. High school seniors reduce their cigarette consumption by 6.5% for every 10% price increase.ⁱ Higher tobacco prices are especially effective at reducing smoking among youth,ⁱⁱ pregnant women,ⁱⁱⁱ and low-income residents.^{iv} In short, the more cigarettes cost, the less people smoke.

As such, the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City supports SB 233 as an important public health strategy to reduce youth smoking in Kansas.

ⁱ Gruber, Jonathan and Jonathan Zinman. 2000. Youth Smoking in the U.S.: Evidence and Implications. In *Risky Behavior Among Youth: An Economic Analysis*, ed. Jonathan Gruber. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

ⁱⁱ Gruber, Jonathan. 2002. The Economics of Tobacco Regulation. *Health Affairs* 21 (2): 146 – 162.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ringel, Jeanne S. and William N. Evans. 2001. Cigarette Taxes and Smoking During Pregnancy. *American Journal of Public Health* 91 (11): 1851 – 1856.

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 1998. Response to Increases in Cigarette Prices by Race/Ethnicity, Income, and Age Groups – United States, 1976 to 1993. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 280 (23): 1979 – 1980.

Farely, Matthew C. et al. 1998. Cigarette Price Elasticities by Race, Age, Income, and Gender. *Research Triangle Institute Working Paper*.