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Mr. Chairman and member of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of increasing the cigarette and tobacco products tax. My name is Jodi Jackson and I'm a volunteer for the American Heart Association. At the age of 42 I suffered a massive heart attack – an event my doctor attributes to many years of smoking.

I began smoking a little later than most – at age 21 – but soon found I was addicted like so many others. Since cigarettes were relatively inexpensive the price certainly wasn't a barrier I had to overcome. I continued to smoke until I became pregnant and fortunately was able to remain a "non-smoker" until my second child was born. After her birth, however, I quickly returned to smoking until the fateful day I suffered my heart attack.

Unfortunately my story is not that unusual. I started smoking when I was young. I made multiple, unsuccessful attempts to quit smoking. I faced death from a heart attack from my years of smoking. For me luck was on my side and my story had a happy ending - I survived a heart attack and I no longer smoke. I get to be mom to two amazing kids and enjoy all that life has to offer. For others, however, they may not be as lucky. Their smoking and use of tobacco products leads to a different outcome with tragic results.

Raising the price of cigarettes and tobacco products is one of the most effective ways to keep kids from starting to smoke and encouraging older smokers to quit. Why do you think the tobacco industry works so hard to fight tobacco tax increases? They know that higher prices of tobacco products costs them customers. Its' really that simple.

Quitting smoking is very hard. The average smoker attempts to quit multiple times before having success and that's one reason even a large number of smokers support the increase you are considering. It provides them with another reason to quit. **More importantly it is well-documented – even by the tobacco industry - higher prices discourage youth from starting to smoke.**

I recognize you have a very difficult budget situation to address and many of the options you have before you are not very attractive. **However, none of the other options provide what an increase in tobacco taxes offers – more revenue for the state while simultaneously reducing health care costs and saving lives.** That cannot be said for raising gasoline taxes, raising sales taxes or the multitude of other options you have available to you.

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Please remember the American Heart Association in your will.

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