



Healthy Communities W Y A N D O T T E

To: Chairman Johnson and Members of the House Taxation
From: Irene Caudillo, Chair of Healthy Communities Wyandotte Policy Committee
Date: March 9, 2018
Re: Written testimony in support of House Bill 2231

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of the proposed tax increases on cigarettes and other tobacco products in House Bill 2231.

I am writing on behalf of Healthy Communities Wyandotte (HCW), a coalition of more than 100 organizations and individuals dedicated to creating a healthier Wyandotte County. These members recognize that the “social determinants” of health—the conditions in which people live, learn, work, and play—have a strong impact on the health of a community.

One of the biggest contributors to poor health outcomes in Wyandotte County and Kansas is the use of cigarettes and other tobacco products. Roughly 24% of the adult population in Wyandotte County is a current smoker. This is an incredibly urgent issue for our community since tobacco addiction has led to devastating consequences the health of families and community as whole due to the expensive burden of healthcare and lost productivity. We have one of the highest Fetal and Infant Mortality rates in the state and the majority of these deaths are linked to tobacco products. However, HB 2231 would prevent 3400 pregnancies from ever being effected by tobacco and save 9000 people from dying early.

HCW endorses a \$1.50 per pack increase in the cigarette tax with parity for OTP, at 65% of the wholesale price.

Increasing tobacco excise taxes is an evidence-based policy approach to accomplishing the critical public health goals of reducing the number of current and future smokers. The evidence is clear that a *substantial* tax increase both encourages adults to quit while also preventing price-sensitive youth from ever becoming addicted. Another small tobacco tax increase will likely do nothing to reduce smoking rates because tobacco companies can absorb small price increases. Plus, the tax on OTP, such as cigars and smokeless tobacco, has not changed since 1972. Wyandotte County and Kansas is ready for this to change. **HB 2231 isn't just a smart policy, but an absolutely necessary one that will save lives.**

For these reasons, we urge the members of the Taxation Committee to support a substantial tax increase on cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Irene Caudillo