

Shannon Williams
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March 9, 2018

The Honorable Steven Johnson
Taxation Committee
Kansas State Capitol
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Re: Testimony in support of tobacco tax increase HB 2231

Dear Representative Johnson:

I am writing this on behalf of my family, friends and many of your constituents.

Like so many of them, I am the daughter of a life-long smoker. For many years my father has unsuccessfully attempted to quit smoking. He knows they are killing him. He also knows that while he was trying to quit the tobacco industry was trying harder to make sure he could not, by increasing the amount of nicotine and adding additives to cigarettes to make smoking more addictive and make it harder to quit.

My dad has always been my super hero; big, strong and tough. In my eyes there was nothing my father could not do, no challenge too large. I know that is a sentiment that many little girls have towards their fathers but many of those little girls are not watching their father deteriorate from health complications from decades of toxic tobacco use.

I'll never forget my father talking with a nurse after getting a stint put in, "You have got to stop smoking, it is killing you. Do it for your family." My father, looking smaller than the big super hero I knew him to be, looked him in the eye and said, "I'll try." My dad is a jokester, so I paused, waiting for the punchline. There was none. He never even cracked a smile. Now when I ask my father what would make him stop smoking? His reply is, "I guess I'll buy them until I can no longer afford to."

He is not the same big, vibrant man with a boisterous laugh. When he laughs now there is always a horrible, wheezing cough. I do not get to see his lovely smile as often, because last year he had a tooth just fall out of its socket. Fortunately, my father is still here with us today, no thanks to the tobacco industry. I wanted to write this letter while there was still time, still hope.

I understand what tobacco can do to a person's body, I have watched it rob my father of years of his life. I understand that feeling of wishing your dad would finally give up smoking cigarettes for good. Sadly, I know tobacco companies only see him as a customer and could not care less about him as a person. I understand the effects of smoking, second-hand smoke and third-hand smoke but, I do not understand why anyone who has the ability to prevent deaths from tobacco would choose not to.

I do not want to have to one day write this letter in memory of my father, telling you how tobacco took his life. You can help me save him and countless others. As a Kansas taxpayer I am tired of the cost that we incur from tobacco use and tired of paying my unfair share. Why shouldn't taxes on tobacco at least cover the health care cost that we all pay as a state due to its use?

Yes, I support the HB 2231 tobacco tax increase of \$1.00 or more. A significant increase in tobacco taxes will help offset what we as taxpayers are paying in healthcare cost attributed to its use in our state and will keep thousands of young Kansans from starting. Let's send a message to big tobacco from Kansas lawmakers and citizens that we put family and quality of life first.

We know tobacco products kill. It doesn't matter if you smoke it or chew it, it kills and causes hardships to families our healthcare system and Kansas businesses like the one my family owns. Why would we support any product when used as intended kills or causes chronic illnesses to so many? We need to increase taxes on all tobacco products.

I hope you come to understand how devastating not increasing the tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products would be. Put the health and hearts of Kansans first. You can be proud of being a part of this and know you helped save lives when you do increase tobacco taxes.

Sincerely,

Shannon Williams
Overland Park, KS

Cc: Kansas House Health and Human Services
Committee Rep. Tom Phillips - Vice-Chair
Rep. Tom Sawyer - Ranking Minority
Rep. John Alcalá
Rep. Tom Burroughs
Rep. Susan Concannon
Rep. Ken Corbet
Rep. Erin Davis
Rep. John Eplee
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