



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation
In Support of SB376
From Bridget McCandless MD, President/CEO**

Dear Chair Tyson and Members of the Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation:

The mission of the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City (HCF) is to provide leadership, advocacy and resources to eliminate barriers and promote quality health for the uninsured and underserved. Since our inception fifteen years ago, HCF has dedicated over \$250 million toward health in our community. Through our work to build healthy communities, we support nonprofits as they advance healthy eating, active living and tobacco prevention. Preventing tobacco use among young people is a critical piece of this strategy.

We are unable to attend the hearing. As such, we are pleased to submit this letter as our testimony in support of SB376. This bill would increase tobacco taxes by \$1.50 per pack with an equal tax on other tobacco products.

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 SB376 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*.