



Kansas Health Foundation

February 14, 2017

Steve Coen, President and CEO
Kansas Health Foundation

Testimony for House Committee on Taxation in support of HB2315

Chairman Johnson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on HB2315, supporting efforts to reduce tobacco use through increased taxes. We appreciate your willingness to receive testimony and to discuss this critical health issue for the people of Kansas in a very transparent way.

The Kansas Health Foundation has been a long-time proponent of efforts to reduce tobacco use, because it is the leading, preventable cause of disease and death in the United States. We know that tobacco use affects many groups across Kansas -- pregnant women (and low birthweight babies), children impacted by second-hand smoke, youth who begin smoking, individuals with mental illness, lower-income Kansans, minorities and long-term smokers. In Kansas, the adult smoking rate is 17.7%, ranking 27th in the United States, according to the 2016 America's Health Rankings report. We recognize that efforts to reduce tobacco use include prevention, policies and efforts to change the environment.

Over the years, the Kansas Health Foundation has worked across a range of areas to increase awareness and help with policy change. We created several statewide campaigns focused on second-hand smoke, including "Take it Outside" and "It's not only smokers who get sick." We have assisted communities all across the state to implement Clean Indoor Air policies. We have helped promote tobacco-free workplaces, schools and college campuses. Most recently, we have provided grants to mental health organizations to help reduce the incidence of smoking for those with mental illness. Kansas adults with mental illness are twice as likely to use tobacco than those without mental illness. And, we believe an increased tobacco tax is another tool to help change the environment within our state and incent smoking Kansans to quit.

At the Kansas Health Foundation, we want to work with Kansans to create a healthier state for generations to come. Reducing tobacco use is critical to individual and community health, and an increased tobacco tax could help with that effort. We appreciate the opportunity to work with local and state partners to improve the health of all Kansans.