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June 30, 2021

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.  
Chairman  
House Committee on Judiciary  
82 Smith St.  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 5571 SUBSTITUTE A - AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES –  
CHILDREN and S 263 SUBSTITUTE B – AN ACT RELATING TO CRIMINAL  
OFFENSES - CHILDREN

Dear Chairman Craven:

I am writing in support of H 5571 A and S 263 B. The proposed legislation would raise the legal age for individuals to be sold or delivered certain tobacco products, including electronic nicotine-delivery systems products from 18 years of age to 21 years of age.

Smoking and tobacco use are a leading cause of preventable death, disease, and disability. More Americans die from smoking-related illnesses than from drug overdoses, car accidents, suicides, and homicides combined. Tobacco use is linked to cancers affecting all organs of the human body, including lung and oral cancers. Tobacco use can cause or worsen respiratory illness, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and other chronic conditions.

In December 2019, Congress passed a federal law raising the tobacco age to 21 nationwide. Currently, 37 states (including Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and New York) have also raised their tobacco ages to 21, along with Washington, D.C.<sup>1</sup> Passage of H 5571 A and S 263 B would allow for Rhode Island state law to align with federal law and would expand education and enforcement opportunity.

From 2017 to 2019, the percentage of Rhode Island high school students using e-cigarettes increased dramatically from 20% to 30%, while cigarette use continued to decline. Nationally and in Rhode Island, tobacco use varies by race, ethnicity, and gender; and higher rates of tobacco use are found among youth who experience certain influencing factors. These factors include historic and emerging advertising trends, community acceptance, and social factors and stressors that influence initiation and continuation. According to the US Surgeon General's report,<sup>2</sup> e-cigarette use among youth and young adults is associated with the use of other tobacco

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<sup>1</sup> *Tobacco twenty-one: Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation. State by state. Retrieved June 29, 2021, from <https://tobacco21.org/state-by-state/>*

<sup>2</sup> *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General—Executive Summary. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and*

products, including conventional cigarettes. Since most tobacco use begins during adolescence, actions to prevent young people from the potential of a lifetime of nicotine addiction are critical.

I applaud the sponsors of the legislation for working so closely and collaboratively with each other to propose legislation that everyone agrees will help address the problem of tobacco use among Rhode Island's youth. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Nicole Alexander, Scott, MD, MPH  
Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary  
The Honorable Grace Diaz  
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House  
The Honorable Cynthia A. Coyne  
Kristen Silvia, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Senate President