

# North Aurelius Healthy Lungs Crusade

## Testimony Supporting HB 4039 - "Raise the Smoking Age"

Strangely enough, I'd actually like to begin my remarks today by citing one of the arguments that has been used to *oppose* this proposed legislation to raise the legal age for tobacco use from 18 to 21: It has been suggested that this Bill fails to take into account current tobacco *addicts* who are between the ages of 18 and 21, so that, for instance, a 19-year-old addict who currently uses tobacco *legally* would be criminalized for acting on what was a legal *addiction* when he first began using the substance. Thus, even opponents of HB 4039 *acknowledge* what is universally recognized: that tobacco is a powerful *addictive* substance.

Unlike other addictive products, like Vernor's ginger ale or Starbucks coffee, tobacco is a *known* carcinogen that kills more than 1,300 people a day, according to recent U of M research. It continues to be the leading cause of preventable death worldwide! Furthermore, youthful indulgence in nicotine use has been proven to negatively impact brain development and increase the risk of developing *other* addictive behaviors. Current legal access to tobacco for 18-year-olds is also a significant factor in the initiation of 15 to 17-year-olds to tobacco use, which is an obvious detriment to the overall long-term health of citizens nationwide.

Smoking or vaping is undeniably pleasant and seemingly harmless at first, so that even those who are aware of its hazards during college years may commence using it as a stimulant or social lubricant only to be found using <sup>A</sup> it four years or more later, even if they had originally intended to quit strictly limit the habit.

While it might seem impractical (some say inappropriate) to outlaw tobacco use for those *over* 21, despite its disastrous impact on smokers and those around them, several states and territories have passed laws raising the legal age to 21 with minimal changes required for law enforcement or retailers to implement the law.

It has been pointed out that revenues from taxes on tobacco are a valuable income source for the state, but the social costs of lost longevity and productivity, coupled with the staggering medical costs, far exceed the value of the fleeting revenue benefits to the government.

Your job as legislators is to represent your constituents and protect them from harm and loss when you can. HB 4039 is one obvious way to fulfill your duty.