



**Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**HEALTH ADVOCATES FIGHT HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
PROPOSAL TO SLASH TOBACCO CONTROL SPENDING BY MORE  
THAN HALF AND COUNTER WITH PROPOSAL TO HIKE CIGARETTE  
TAX TO RESTORE FUNDING**

**PROVIDENCE** – As the RI House of Representatives prepares to debate the FY 2012 budget on Friday, public health advocates are calling on all House members to reject a controversial budget cut that was included in the House Finance Committee budget – a proposal to cut nearly \$400,000 from the tobacco prevention and cessation program, slashing state program funding, already well below CDC recommended levels, by more than half.

Robert Crausman, MD, Chairman of the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network’s Steering Committee said, “There is plenty of money to pay to this life-saving program. In fact, our state receives over \$135 million a year from tobacco tax revenue and it has an obligation to support programs for prevention and cessation. At current levels less than 0.5% of these revenues are dedicated to tobacco control. This low level of investment in prevention is unconscionable!”

Tobacco use is still the leading cause of preventable death and disease in RI, killing more people than alcohol, AIDS, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined with annual tobacco-caused health care costs exceeding a half-billion dollars (\$506 million). Dr. Robert Crausman said, “We need to do more to reduce tobacco use, not less.”

The House Finance Committee's FY '12 budget slashed nearly \$400,000 in state funding from tobacco prevention and cessation services. Walter Harper, PhD, Director of the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Program said, "It is extremely important, especially in light of the new FDA warning label mandates for cigarette packaging, to maintain tobacco control policies and tobacco cessation program funding. We must never forget that commercial tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Rhode Island."

The Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network is comprised of more than 30 state and local organizations and we are working hard to line up support for an amendment filed by Representative David Bennett (D-Warwick) to restore funding to the tobacco control program by raising the cigarette excise tax by ten-cents per pack and using new revenues for tobacco prevention and cessation services.

Susan Roberts, of the American Cancer Society said, "We are grateful that Representative Bennett has embraced this cause. As a nurse, his credibility as an advocate for public health makes him an ideal leader for this issue. Tobacco use accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths and 87% of lung cancer deaths. This funding can save lives from cancer and we are up for the fight."

Megan Tucker, of the American Heart Association said, "We thank Representative Bennett for his leadership on this issue. It is important to maintain a well-funded tobacco control effort in the state, and whatever measures the General Assembly needs to consider to keep this highly successful program funded should be considered."

Dr. Patricia Nolan, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Public Health Institute, was at the helm of the RI Department of Health for 10 years during some of its most aggressive tobacco control campaigns. Dr. Patricia Nolan said, "House members will take a roll call vote on restoring tobacco control funding on Friday June 24, 2011 and we will watch in eager anticipation and hope that the majority of members vote to prioritize protecting all Rhode Island citizens and particularly children from the ravages of commercial tobacco addiction."

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**Mission of the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network** - The mission of the Rhode Island Tobacco Control Network is to educate, mobilize, and protect all Rhode Island residents from the destructive effects of nicotine addiction and commercial tobacco use.

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