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National Report: Rhode Island Ranks 38th in Protecting Kids from Tobacco

Washington, DC (November 30, 2011) – Rhode Island ranks 38th in the nation in funding programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit, according to a national report released today by a coalition of public health organizations.

Rhode Island currently spends \$372,665 a year on tobacco prevention and cessation programs, which is 2.5 percent of the \$15.2 million recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Other key findings for Rhode Island include:

- Rhode Island this year will collect \$183 million in revenue from the 1998 tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes, but will spend just 0.2 percent of it on tobacco prevention programs. This means Rhode Island is spending less than a penny of every dollar in tobacco revenue to fight tobacco use.
- The tobacco companies spend \$27.3 million a year to market their products in Rhode Island. This is 73 times what the state spends on tobacco prevention.

The annual report on states' funding of tobacco prevention programs, titled "A Broken Promise to Our Children: The 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 13 Years Later," was released by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Lung Association, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights.

Rhode Island has implemented several effective measures to reduce tobacco use, including a strong, statewide smoke-free workplace law and a cigarette tax of \$3.46 per pack, the second highest in the country. However, the state is falling short in funding tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

"Rhode Island has taken several critical steps to reduce tobacco use, but the state's progress is at risk unless it invests more in preventing kids from smoking and helping smokers quit," said Matthew L. Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. "Even in these difficult budget times, tobacco prevention is a smart investment for Rhode Island that will protect kids, save lives and save money by reducing tobacco-related health care costs."

In Rhode Island, 13.3 percent of high school students smoke, and 1,300 more kids become regular smokers each year. Tobacco annually claims 1,600 lives and costs the state \$506 million in health care bills.

Nationally, the report finds that most states are failing to adequately fund tobacco prevention and cessation programs. Altogether, the states have cut funding for these programs to the lowest level since 1999, when they first started receiving tobacco settlement payments. Key national findings of the report include:

- The states this year will collect \$25.6 billion from the tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes, but will spend just 1.8 percent of it – \$456.7 million – on tobacco prevention programs. This means the states are spending less than two cents of every dollar in tobacco revenue to fight tobacco use.
- States have cut funding for tobacco prevention programs by 12 percent (\$61.2 million) in the past year and by 36 percent (\$260.5 million) in the past four years.
- Only two states – Alaska and North Dakota – currently fund tobacco prevention programs at the CDC-recommended level.

The report warns that the nation's progress in reducing smoking is at risk unless states increase funding for programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit. The United States has significantly reduced smoking among both youth and adults, but 19.3 percent of adults and 19.5 percent of high school students still smoke.

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., killing more than 400,000 people and costing \$96 billion in health care bills each year.

More information, including the full report and state-specific information, can be obtained at www.tobaccofreekids.org/reports/settlements.