

TOBACCO FREE RHODE ISLAND



RHODE ISLAND
MEDICAL SOCIETY

December 10, 2013

Dear Governor Chafee:

We are writing to respectfully request that Rhode Island make a greater investment in tobacco prevention. Specifically, we recommend an investment of \$3,100,000 in the FY2015 budget for the Department of Health's Tobacco Control Program, which would restore the budget cuts of the past decade. We also strongly recommend adequate funding of \$124,640 to the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals to support its annual compliance inspections and reporting of state tobacco youth access laws, activities and enforcements.

Tobacco control programs play a crucial role in the prevention of many chronic conditions, such as cancer, heart disease, and respiratory illness. Evidence continues to mount supporting the critical role that comprehensive state and local tobacco control programs play in keeping young people from starting to smoke, increasing the number of people who successfully quit, and decreasing nonsmokers' exposure to secondhand smoke. Although we know how to address these problems, state funding for tobacco control programs continues to be sorely inadequate.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that Rhode Island invest \$15.2 million in FY2014 on a comprehensive tobacco prevention program. **Yet in FY2014, Rhode Island will spend just 13.6% of the CDC recommended level, of which only \$388,027 – just 2.6% -- is from state funding.**

The tobacco industry spends \$23 million every year marketing tobacco to Rhode Islanders. Currently there is an additional marketing blitz to promote electronic cigarettes, which as an unregulated product is exempt from the advertising restrictions that apply to regulated tobacco products. Youth are being targeted with enticing ads on billboards, radio, TV and in magazines, social media, emails and texts. Recent studies show e-cigarette use by teens has doubled since 2010. Meanwhile, *state funding to counter the use of these and all other addictive nicotine products by teens is not available*, and there is no promotional budget for Rhode Island's free Smokers' Quitline, 1-800-QUITNOW.

Rhode Island has the third highest cigarette tax in the country, but ranks 42nd in spending on prevention. In FY2013, Rhode Island generated \$178.5 million from tobacco products (state excise taxes plus the Master Settlement Agreement), yet we allocated just \$376,437 -- two-tenths of one percent -- to tobacco control.

By contrast, other Northeastern states spend a lot more per capita on tobacco prevention. Maine's FY2014 investment in tobacco prevention is \$8.1 million. Vermont's FY14 investment is \$3.9 million. Connecticut's FY14 investment is \$3 million.

Smoking costs Rhode Island close to \$870 million in economic costs each year, and every year 1,600 Rhode islanders die from tobacco use, and thousands more suffer expensive and debilitating illnesses.

We urge you to increase our state's investment in tobacco prevention, to save lives and healthcare dollars.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia A. Nolan, MD, MPH".

Dr. Patricia Nolan
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