



March 11, 2014

Senator Daniel DaPonte
Senate Committee on Finance
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Fiscal Year 2015 Department of Health Budget

Dear Chairman DaPonte and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to give comment on Rhode Island's Fiscal Year 2015 Budget for the Department of Health.

Tobacco Free Rhode Island is a statewide network representing over fifty public health policy, community, local governmental, labor and health professional associations and organizations, dedicated to the mission of reducing tobacco use.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Rhode Island. Each year, 1,500 Rhode Islanders die from their own smoking and tobacco use; and each year 900 Rhode Island kids under age eighteen become new daily tobacco users.

We 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.

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 recommends that Rhode Island invest \$12.8 million in FY2014 on a comprehensive tobacco prevention program, yet **Rhode Island is spending just 3% of the recommended investment.**

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. 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 a miniscule promotional budget

for Rhode Island's free Smokers' Quitline, 1-800-QUITNOW. Calls to the Quitline are down, likely reflecting the fact that public awareness of its existence is low.

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 respectfully 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". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Dr. Patricia Nolan
Chair, Tobacco Free Rhode Island