



March 1, 2021

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Senate Health Care Committee
Re: SB 587

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Knopp, and Committee Members,

My name is Gwyn Ashcom and I'm the Tobacco Prevention Coordinator for Washington County Public Health. Thank you for the opportunity to comment in strong support of Senate Bill 587, which would create a statewide tobacco retail licensure program, also known as TRL. Washington County supports a statewide TRL that has no cap on fees and ensures local public health can pass stronger time, place, manner requirements, and enforcement mechanisms. Statewide TRL is a Washington County 2021 legislative priority for our Board of Commissioners, especially as Oregon is one of only nine states without a tobacco licensing program.

TRL is a mechanism in which retailers must obtain a license before selling tobacco products and comply with all relevant laws or risk losing the privilege of selling these products. Most importantly, licensure reduces youth access to tobacco and nicotine products by enforcing the minimum legal sales age requirement. TRL is a strategy that can reduce the number of Oregon youth and young adults that become addicted to tobacco, help current tobacco users quit, and reduce health care costs. Research has shown that in jurisdictions with a strong comprehensive licensing program, youth were 33% less likely to have initiated cigarette use and 26% less likely to initiate vape use compared to those jurisdictions with no such program in place.

Tobacco products are cheap, easily accessible and heavily promoted, particularly in the retail environment. Seeing such a high prevalence of advertising in stores normalizes the presence of tobacco, encourages initiation and impulse purchasing all the while discouraging cessation. Youth are also susceptible to the use of flavors, in fact 82% of flavored tobacco product users are under the age of 24, with the highest percentage being high school students.

Due to a lack of a statewide TRL, Washington County continues efforts on passing a local TRL ordinance that ensures fairness and equity for tobacco retailers to legally conduct business in compliance with state and local laws, as well as protect the health of our community. Our TRL ordinance would include additional protective strategies such as flavor restrictions and the prohibition of redemption of tobacco coupons and price promotions. These additional strategies we believe are necessary parts of an effective, comprehensive program to reduce the number of children who become addicted to tobacco.

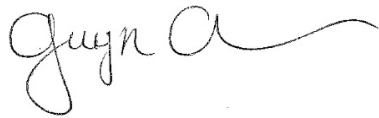
In August 2020 Washington County conducted a community panel survey that included questions regarding tobacco policies. Of survey respondents, 87% agreed or strongly agreed that retailers in Washington county should have to have a license to sell tobacco and vaping products. When looking at respondents who identified as BIPOC, that number rose to 94%.

We know that tobacco retailers cluster in neighborhoods with a high percentage of low-income residents or residents of color. These communities are targeted by tobacco companies, and they disproportionately suffer the health harms caused by tobacco use. A comprehensive tobacco retail licensing program could improve these inequities. In order to advance the work of TRL with our businesses and local communities, we will be contracting with 'Human Impact Partners' to assist us in ensuring we approach this work with a racial justice and power lens.

Washington County believes TRL is an effective tool that helps state and local officials manage the retail environment by ensuring that retailers comply with all tobacco control laws. Passing a statewide TRL is the next logical step in the fight against the tobacco industry's influence on our youth, negative impact in our communities and the adverse health effects of this dangerous product.

Thank you for considerations of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gwyn A", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Gwyn Ashcom, MPH, MCHES
Tobacco Prevention Coordinator
Washington County Health and Human Services – Public Health