

Providence Health & Services
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February 2, 2016

The Honorable Laurie Monnes Anderson
Chair, Senate Committee on Health Care
State Capitol
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Senate Bill 1559, Tobacco licensing and sales

Dear Senator Monnes Anderson and members of the committee:

Providence Health & Services is committed to working with policy makers and other community-minded organizations to find new ways to create healthier communities, together. Fulfilling this vision will require public policy that promotes healthy decision making and innovate partnerships that maximize our opportunity to improve health outcomes – regardless of an individual’s socioeconomic status.

Senate Bill 1559, with amendments, would support this effort in two essential ways:

- Licensing requirements will aid in enforcing current laws governing tobacco sales. As one of only 11 states in the country that does not require a license to sell tobacco - illegal sales of tobacco products in Oregon, particularly to minors, is an ongoing issue.
- Raising the sales age to 21 years will delay the use of tobacco products among minors and has the potential to significantly reduce the total number of people who smoke, since 95% start smoking before the age of 21.

In addition to being a significant step toward improving the wellbeing and life expectancy of Oregonians, making these changes now is critical to the financial stability of Oregon’s Medicaid budget. With the prevalence of tobacco use among adult Oregon Health Plan members nearly two times higher than the general public and approximately 10% of annual OHP medical expenditures related to smoking – we cannot depend solely on education and tobacco cessation programs to bend this cost curve.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue; Providence hopes you’ll join us in supporting Senate Bill 1559.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave Underriner".

Dave Underriner
Chief Executive
Providence Health & Services - Oregon