

May 23, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
S-230 United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tim Kaine
United States Senate
231 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Senator Kaine:

On behalf of our 163,000 member dentists, we are writing to express our enthusiastic support for S. 1541, the Tobacco-Free Youth Act. This legislation would increase the legal age to purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21 years old and is critical in addressing our current youth tobacco epidemic.

Preventing oral cancer and other tobacco-related diseases have been a longstanding priority for the ADA. About 9 out of 10 people who die from oral and pharyngeal cancers use tobacco, and the risk of developing these cancers is related to how much (and how often) they use.ⁱ On average, 40 percent of those with the disease will not survive more than 5 years.ⁱⁱ Tobacco products are also causally associated with higher rates of gum disease, periodontal disease, mucosal lesions, bone damage, tooth loss, jaw bone loss and more.^{iii,iv}

S. 1541 would help prevent tobacco use among our youth by raising the national age to legally purchase tobacco products from 18 to 21 years old. It would help reduce the number of young people who begin smoking before age 21, which represents 95 percent of current adult smokers.^v

Moreover, the bill would apply to the more than 3.6 million middle and high school students who are e-cigarette users.^{vi} Research shows that young people who use e-cigarettes are more likely to transition to smoking cigarettes. For that reason, the ADA does not consider these non-traditional tobacco products to be safer (or less harmful) alternatives to smoking.

Increasing the tobacco sale age from 18 to 21 will not stop our youth from seeking out tobacco products, but is important step in that direction.

We applaud you for introducing this important legislation and are pleased to offer our enthusiastic support. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Natalie Hales at 202-898-2404 or halesn@ada.org. Information is also available at ADA.org/tobacco.

Sincerely,

/s/

Jeffrey M. Cole, D.D.S., M.B.A.
President

JMC:KTO:nh

/s/

Kathleen T. O'Loughlin, D.M.D., M.P.H.
Executive Director

ⁱ American Cancer Society, "Detailed Guide: Oral Cavity and Oropharyngeal Cancer (2007)," http://www.cancer.org/docroot/CRI/content/CRI_2_4_2X_What_are_the_risk_factors_for_oral_cavity_and_oropharyngeal_cancer_60.asp, Accessed September 25, 2009.

ⁱⁱ National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research, "Oral cancer," <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/OralCancer/OralCancer.htm>, Accessed September 25, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Couch ET, Chaffee BW, Gansky SA, Walsh MM. [The changing tobacco landscape: What dental professionals need to know](#). J Am Dent Assoc 2016;147(7):561-9.

^{iv} "The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report of the Surgeon General", U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health; Washington, D.C., 2004.

^v United States Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. ICPSR36361-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2016-03-22. <http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36361.v1>

^{vi} Results from 2018 National Youth Tobacco Survey Show Dramatic Increase in E-cigarette Use Among Youth Over Past Year, Office Commissioner - <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/results-2018-national-youth-tobacco-survey-show-dramatic-increase-e-cigarette-use-among-youth-over>