



Tobacco 21 Legislation
Akron City Council Health & Social Services Committee
Testimony by Dr. Robert Schweikert
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Chairwoman Omobien and members of the Health & Social Service Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of the Tobacco 21 legislation, which would raise the age of purchase of tobacco products from 18 to 21. My name is Dr. Robert Schweikert, and I am Chief Cardiologist for Cleveland Clinic Akron General.

Tobacco use remains the single largest preventable cause of disease and premature death. Smoking increases the risk of heart disease and stroke by two to four times. Each year, tobacco claims the lives of 20,200 Ohioans and costs us \$5.6 billion in health care expenditures.

Smoking also has a negative effect on birth outcomes, as smoking while pregnant can lead to low birth weight and other complications. According to 2014 data, the pregnancy smoking rate in Summit County is nearly twice the national average. In Summit County, 15.2% of pregnant women smoked during their pregnancy, compared to just 8.4% of pregnant women nationally.

Unfortunately, Ohio is on the wrong path when it comes to tobacco use. Almost 1 in 4 Ohioans are smokers. At a time when the national rate is decreasing, Ohio's rate of smoking is increasing - we currently have the 8th highest smoking rate in the country. We must turn the tide on this issue.

In Ohio alone, more than 1 in 5 high school students currently smoke, and 11,900 more will become daily smokers this year.

Big tobacco continues its efforts to entice new generations to take up tobacco. The industry spends more than \$1 million per hour – that's \$8.8 billion annually – on the marketing of its products. Ad campaigns with the likes of cartoon characters have been replaced with popular, sweet-flavored cigars and e-cigarettes to target younger generations.

We hope lawmakers will not allow this to continue. We owe it to our children and the generations that follow to provide a healthy, tobacco-free country. Our health, and the economic health of our nation, depends on it.

Increasing the age of purchasing tobacco products in Akron and Summit County would be an extremely effective way to reduce smoking rates. Research shows that 95% of adult smokers began smoking before the age of 21, and that 80% of new smokers are under 21.

We have the opportunity with the Tobacco 21 legislation to turn these numbers around and move Ohio in the right direction.

I am confident that these changes will result in better health for all citizens of Akron and Summit County. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.