



November 3, 2017

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Durbin
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Diana DeGette
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Sens. Schatz and Durbin and Rep. DeGette:

On behalf of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which represents 129,000 family physicians and medical students across the country, thank you for reintroducing the *Tobacco to 21 Act* in the 115th Congress. This important legislation would raise the minimum legal age for purchasing or using tobacco products from 18 to 21 years.

The need for this legislation is clear. As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports, cigarette smoking causes about one of every five deaths in the United States each year. More than 480,000 deaths annually (including deaths from secondhand smoke) are attributable to the use of tobacco products. The value of preventing individuals from starting to smoke until they are at least 21 is due to the greater danger of addiction for the young person when tobacco use is initiated before 21. The 2014 Surgeon General's report on tobacco use stated that, "Nearly all tobacco use begins during youth and progresses during young adulthood. More than 3,200 children age 18 or younger smoke their first cigarette every day. Nearly 9 out of 10 smokers start before the age of 18..."

The AAFP's [position paper](#), "Tobacco: Preventing and Treating Nicotine Dependence and Tobacco Use," notes that if current rates continue, 5.6 million children alive today will ultimately die prematurely from smoking-caused disease. That is why, since 2003, AAFP [policy](#) has stated: "The AAFP further urges legislation raising the legal age for the purchase of tobacco products from 18 to 21 years of age and requiring active enforcement of age-at-sale for tobacco purchases."

The AAFP is pleased to join with so many other organizations concerned about the public's health to support the *Tobacco to 21 Act* and we urge the Congress to pass this legislation as quickly as possible. Please contact Teresa Baker, Senior Government Relations Representative, at 202-232-9033 or tbaker@aafp.org, for any assistance your staff may need with this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Meigs, Jr., MD, FAAFP".

John Meigs, Jr., MD, FAAFP
Board Chair

www.aafp.org

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