



September 23, 2019

Mayor Hancock and Denver City Council Members,

Our organizations advocate for public policies proven to prevent kids from using tobacco, help tobacco users quit and ones that protect everyone from secondhand smoke.

It is public health heroes, such as yourselves, who help achieve the outcomes mentioned above. Thank you for leading the way in protecting Denver's kids by supporting a policy that raises the age of sale on tobacco in Denver from 18 to 21 and enacts a tobacco retail license requirement.

Roughly 95 percent of adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21. Colorado has the highest teen vaping rate in the nation at twice the national average - with 26.2 percent of our high schoolers reporting the use of e-cigarettes. Policies, such as the one under consideration, are a critical part of impacting the rate of initiation by kids and will help to eliminate a point of access.

A critical component of raising the age of sale is requiring all retailers who sell tobacco to be licensed. Doing so significantly increases compliance levels by retailers, diminishes illegal sales to kids and subsequently decreases both use and access. Despite national data which sources where kids report getting their tobacco products, we know that Denver data, accessible from DDPHE, reveals that retail sales to kids are prevalent within the City of Denver. We also know that there are 40 retailers with multiple violations over the past six months who have met the criteria to enter into a no-sales order. It is imperative that Denver's enforcement officers know who is selling tobacco in the City to verify compliance effectively, and that they can ensure these sales do not reoccur without consequence.

We applaud the City for putting the onus of accountability on the retailer as opposed to the youth. We, as public health organizations, recognize that purchase, use, and possession laws are unlikely to reduce youth initiation, smoking prevalence, and can potentially increase smoking rates among youth who seek to engage in behavior deemed deviant or associated with adulthood.

We know this policy is an effective barrier to kids becoming addicted to nicotine and tobacco, and that it will have a positive impact on public health and save lives. We value your commitment to enact evidence-based policies that prevent youth initiation of tobacco.

Thank you for your leadership and partnership to protect Denver's kids. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us directly.

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