

March of Dimes Foundation

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September 29, 2017

The Honorable Richard Durbin  
United States Senate  
711 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Durbin,

On behalf of the March of Dimes, a unique collaboration of scientists, clinicians, parents, members of the business community, and other volunteers representing every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, I would like to commend you for introducing the Tobacco Tax Equity Act of 2017. This bill is an important step toward mitigating the public health impact of deadly tobacco products.

Tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable and premature death in the United States, accounting for 48,000 deaths each year. Further, tobacco is a significant risk factor leading to adverse pregnancy outcomes, including preterm birth and infant death. While the number of Americans smoking cigarettes has declined in recent decades, there has been an alarming increase in the use of alternative tobacco products, such as cigars, smokeless tobacco, and pipe tobacco. These products pose the same health risks as cigarettes and must be subject to the same stringent regulations. Unfortunately, the federal tax rate for these products is dramatically lower than the rate for cigarettes.

To protect the health of mothers, infants and families, the United States must create parity between tax rates for all tobacco products. Research suggests that higher tobacco taxes deter youth from starting to smoke and motivate adults to quit. The Tobacco Tax Equity Act of 2017 would advance this goal by setting the tax rates for under-taxed products such as cigars, pipe tobacco and smokeless tobacco at a rate comparable with cigarettes taxes. The bill would also requires the Department of the Treasury to determine an appropriate federal tax rate for any newly-deemed tobacco products, such as electronic cigarettes.

The March of Dimes thanks you for your leadership on this important public health issue and looks forward to working with you to promote the passage of the Tobacco Tax Equity Act of 2017. For additional information, please contact Rebecca Abbott, Deputy Director of Federal Affairs, at [rabbott@marchofdimes.org](mailto:rabbott@marchofdimes.org) or (202) 659-1800.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Pellegrini  
Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Government Affairs