

September 28, 2017

The Honorable Diana DeGette
U.S. House of Representatives
2111 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative DeGette:

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 thank you for introducing H.R. 4273, the Tobacco to 21 Act, which would raise the minimum age to purchase tobacco products to 21 years of age.

While cigarette use has steadily declined in recent decades, tobacco remains a significant public health threat. Today, tobacco is the leading cause of preventable and premature death in the United States, accounting for 48,000 deaths each year, and a significant risk factor leading to adverse pregnancy outcomes and poor child health. According to the 2014 Surgeon General's report, in the last 50 years, 10,000 babies have died from sudden infant death syndrome or complications of prematurity, low birthweight, and other conditions as a result of parental smoking. Exposure to tobacco smoke in utero or in the environment after birth has been linked to increased incidence of respiratory infections, ear infections, and behavioral disorders. Further, children and infants who are exposed to prenatal maternal smoking and in-home environmental tobacco smoke have a high incidence of severe asthma.

The Tobacco to 21 Act is a monumental step forward for public health in the United States. Ninety percent of adult smokers begin smoking during teenage years. Raising the minimum age required to purchase tobacco products can significantly improve public health outcomes for women, children, and infants by delaying the age at which an individual starts using these products, or better yet, preventing their use altogether. Many states and localities across the country have already prohibited the sale of tobacco to individuals under 21 years of age, however, these are too few and far between to adequately prevent adverse birth outcomes. It is time for the federal government to bring this important public health protection to every American.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue. The March of Dimes looks forward to working with you to promote the passage of the Tobacco to 21 Act. For additional information, please contact Rebecca Abbott, Deputy Director of Federal Affairs, at rabbott@marchofdimes.org or (202) 659-1800.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Pellegrini
Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Government Affairs