



August 22, 2019

Dear Mayor Carter and members of the St. Paul City Council:

I am writing on behalf of the American Heart Association to express our support for the proposed ordinance that would raise the minimum sales age for tobacco products from 18 to 21 in St. Paul, without penalizing youth.

The National Academy of Medicine reports that there would be a 25 percent reduction in smoking initiation among 15-to-17-year-olds if the age to purchase tobacco was raised to 21. Preventing youth from starting to smoke is essential to reducing smoking prevalence, considering that almost 95 percent of addicted adult smokers started before age 21. Increasing the age gap between kids and those who can legally buy tobacco will help remove access to tobacco products from the high-school environment and stop the start.

I urge you to remove penalties for underage purchase, use and possession of tobacco products (often called PUP). Increasing the tobacco sales age should not be about punishing our kids. Rather, it should be about protecting them from a lifetime of addiction. As you continue to discuss increasing the tobacco age in St. Paul, please move forward with an ordinance that does not include PUP penalties for people under 21. These penalties have not been proven to reduce youth tobacco use and they open the door to selective enforcement against young persons of color.

In Minnesota, 40 communities have also raised the minimum age to purchase tobacco from 18 to 21 and many cities statewide are considering adopting this policy. We need to continue to do everything we can to protect the health of our young people.

St. Paul has the opportunity to help prevent another generation from becoming lifelong tobacco users. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jess Nolan", written over a horizontal line.

Jess Nolan
Community Advocacy Director
Jess.Nolan@heart.org

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Bell", written over a horizontal line.

Justin Bell
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