

Dear Mayor Carter and Members of the Saint Paul City Council,

My name is Gene Nichols and I am the Chair of the Open Cities Health Center's Board of Directors, and current member of the Ramsey County Community Health Advisory Committee. I am in full support of the proposed ordinance to increase the tobacco sales age in Saint Paul, from 18 to 21.

I understand that at the City Council meeting on Wednesday, August 21 there was discussion around language that would penalize youth under 21 for purchase, use or possession of tobacco products. I want to express my concerns for these penalties and share why they may actually detract from more effective enforcement measures. Given the economic and recreational attractions in Saint Paul, young people visiting the city with a tobacco product in their pocket could be committing a crime without their knowledge. It is easier to educate community vendors than it is each person who may be entering your city. As past Health and Wellness Chair of the African American Leadership Forum-Twin Cities, I can attest to the importance of being clear about such penalties that affect young African American young people.

Tobacco 21 is about protecting our young people from a lifetime of nicotine addiction and tobacco related illness. It is not about punishing our kids, who have long been targeted by the tobacco industry with appealing products and advertising.

National and local organizations have discussed this issue at length and have come to a consensus based in scientific evidence that the most effective way to address youth tobacco use is to focus on routine compliance checks and strong penalties to retailers for sales to underage youth. Penalizing youth has not been proven to be an effective strategy for reducing youth tobacco use.

Thank you for doing everything you can to protect our children, and all people in Saint Paul from the harms of tobacco. Saint Paul will help prevent another generation from becoming lifelong tobacco users. Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this issue.

Best Regards,

G.M. Nichols
Chairman of the Board
Open Cities Health Center