

# **Durbin, Schatz, DeGette, reintroduce legislation to raise smoking age to 21**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), Brian Schatz (D-HI) and U.S. Representative Diana DeGette (D-CO-01) reintroduced the Tobacco to 21 Act, bicameral legislation that would prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 21. Five states, the District of Columbia, and more than 200 localities in an additional 13 states have raised the minimum tobacco age of sale to 21 – including Chicago, Lake County, and ten other localities in Illinois. Studies have shown that three-quarters of Americans favor raising the tobacco age of sale to 21 years, including seven in ten smokers.

“With Big Tobacco constantly targeting our youth through new and flavored products, it’s no surprise that nearly all tobacco users began their addiction as kids or young adults,” said Durbin. “Across Illinois and the country, cities and states are fighting back with common-sense policies to shield kids from a lifetime of addiction. By raising the federal tobacco age of sale to 21, we can help prevent a new generation from tobacco-related disease, health care costs, and death.”

“Research shows that raising the minimum smoking age to 21 would save lives,” said Schatz. “In 2015, Hawai‘i became the first state to raise the age limit, and since then, four other states have joined us. This bill would bring all 50 states together, so we can protect our young people from this addiction, and save lives in the process.”

“Smoking is a deadly, addictive habit that can harm human health even in limited amounts,” said DeGette. “It is especially hazardous to developing bodies. Why on earth would we wish to expose our young people to its dangers? As federal legislators, it is our moral obligation to ensure that the law does not favor the tobacco industry over the health and safety of our nation’s youth. This bill would go a long way to keeping carcinogens out of young people’s hands – and throats, and lungs.”

Every day, approximately 1,300 people die from smoking-related diseases, making tobacco the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Research from the National Academy of Medicine shows that raising the minimum legal age of sale of tobacco products to 21 nationwide would reduce the number of new tobacco users, decrease smoking frequency by 12 percent, and would result in 4.2 million fewer years of life lost for those born between 2000 and 2019. Currently, ninety-five percent of adult smokers begin smoking before they turn 21, making the ages of 18 to 21 a critical period when many smokers develop a lifelong addiction.

In the Senate, the legislation (S.2100) is cosponsored by U.S. Senators Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawai‘i), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), and Al Franken (D-Minn.). Companion legislation (H.R.4273) was introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Diana DeGette (D-Colo.) and is cosponsored by U.S. Representatives Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.), Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.), Suzanne Bonamici (D-Ore.), John Garamendi (D-Calif.), Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), and Tulsi Gabbard (D-Hawai‘i).

The Tobacco to 21 Act is supported by the Academic Pediatric Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, the American Pediatric Society, the American Public Health Association, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, the Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs, the Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs, the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, the First Focus Campaign for Children, the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the

Pediatric Policy Council, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, the Society for Pediatric Research, the Society for Public Health Education, and the Trust for America's Health.