



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**

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**Testimony Re: Article 8 – Cigarette Tax**  
**House Committee on Finance**  
**March 22, 2017**  
**Jim Beasley, Policy Analyst**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide informational testimony today regarding Budget Article 8 Cigarette Tax.

**Marked Progress and Remaining Need**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has been tracking the tremendous progress that Rhode Island has made with reducing the number of youth who report using tobacco products.

- **Declines with Adolescent Cigarette use:** The percentage of Rhode Island middle school students who report ever trying cigarette declined from 16% in 2007 to 7% in 2015. Current cigarette use also declined from 4% to 1% during that time period. Similar declines were reported among Rhode Island high school students. Between 1997 and 2015, reports of ever trying a cigarette declined from 69% to 22% and current cigarette use declined from 35% to 5%. Rhode Island has the lowest current cigarette use rate for both middle (1%) and high school (5%) students in the nation among ranked states in 2015.<sup>1</sup>
- **Concerns with Adolescent Electronic Vapor and Other Tobacco Product Use:** Despite these marked declines in cigarette use, Rhode Island adolescents still report using a wide variety of other tobacco products, includes cigars, hookah, and smokeless tobacco. Electronic vapor products are one of the most popular emerging products being used. In Rhode Island in 2015, 41% of high school students report ever using an electronic vapor product and 19% reported current use in the past 30 days. Similarly, 16% of Rhode Island middle school students reported ever using an electronic vapor product and 8% reported current use during that time.<sup>2</sup>
- **Family Risk Factors for Tobacco:** Family tobacco use poses risks for infant and teens alike. Mother’s smoking during pregnancy is associated with adverse birth outcomes. In Rhode Island between 2011 and 2015, 7% (4,007) of all births were to women who smoked during their pregnancy. During that time, Rhode Island mothers who smoked had higher percentages of low birthweight (12.9%) and preterm births (12.1%) compared to mothers who did not smoke (6.8% and 8.5% respectively). Parent tobacco use is also associated with teen tobacco use. In Rhode Island in 2015, 34% of middle school students and 32% of high school students reported living with someone who smoked cigarettes.<sup>3,4</sup>

**More Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Programming and Funding is Needed**

Despite state laws prohibiting purchases of tobacco products, a number of Rhode Island youth report buying such products. One in five (22%) Rhode Island high school students under age 18 who use an electronic vapor during the past 30 days reported buying it in a store and 21% reported buying cigarettes in a store as well. In addition, among Rhode Island high school students who reported current cigarette use, 46% reported trying to quit. More prevention and cessation programming for children and families is needed to continue to reduce overall tobacco use.<sup>5</sup>

### **Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Restricted Receipt Recommendation**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT recommends that the General Assembly enact legislation that creates a Tobacco cessation and prevention restricted receipt account. This will help ensure that funds derived from this cigarette tax are annually allocated for important public health tobacco programming.

### **Closing**

Tobacco prevention and cessation is a public health issue that Rhode Island can solve. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT urges the General Assembly to continue to enact legislation and allocate sufficient resources needed to help reduce the number of children and families who use tobacco. We thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued leadership on children's health.

### **References**

- 1,2,3,5 Rhode Island Department of Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1997-2015
- 4 Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data Analysis, 2011-2015