
Tobacco Free Mass

Massachusetts Coalition for a Healthy Future

May 7, 2021

The Honorable Joanne Comerford, Senate Chair
The Honorable Marjorie Decker, House Chair
Joint Committee on Public Health
State House, Room 130
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Comerford and Decker:

Tobacco Free Mass strongly opposes HB 2287, *An Act relative to local boards of health and the sale of legal tobacco products in the Commonwealth*. This legislation would prevent local boards of health from enacting important legislation to protect young people from the predatory practices of the tobacco industry.

Massachusetts' local boards of health have taken a strategic, thoughtful approach to preventing young people from becoming addicted to tobacco products. Local boards of health have been successful in preventing youth access and exposure to tobacco products through policies including preventing tobacco sales near schools, reducing access to cheap cigars, limiting young people's exposure to tobacco products, and removing tobacco products from sale in pharmacies. These efforts have been instrumental in driving down youth tobacco initiation and use rates in the Commonwealth and are a model for the nation.

Our local boards of health have a long history of successful community mobilization. Years ago, they led the way in prohibiting smoking in public places, something we take for granted in Massachusetts today. More recently, they led the way in removing flavored tobacco products from youth-serving retail stores. In both cases, their experience and expertise enabled state lawmakers to create thoughtful, legally sound legislation that has a lasting, positive impact on the health of people in Massachusetts.

Local boards of health communicate with each other on their experience implementing and enforcing policy, sharing best practices and lessons learned. This shared knowledge base strengthens and improves the public health response statewide. Local boards of health are nimble. They have the power and the obligation to protect their communities and should not be impeded from doing so.

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network | American Heart Association | American Lung Association | Association for Behavioral Healthcare | Bay State Community Services | Berkshire AHEC | Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts | Boston Public Health Commission | Dana Farber Cancer Institute | Gandara Center | Greater Lawrence Family Health Center | Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts | Health Resources in Action | Institute for Health and Recovery | Massachusetts Academy of Family Physicians | Massachusetts Association of Health Boards | Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics | Massachusetts Dental Society | Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association | Massachusetts Health Officers Association | Massachusetts Medical Society | Massachusetts Medical Society Alliance | Massachusetts Municipal Association | Mercy Medical Center | MetroWest Health Foundation | MGH Community Health Associates | Partners Health Care | Public Health Advocacy Institute | UMass Center for Tobacco Treatment Research & Training | UMass Memorial Health Care

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House Bill 2287 would preempt and limit local governments' ability to create and adapt policies based on what they know is best for their communities and residents. It flies in the face of what we know to be true—that local boards of health have responded responsibly and thoughtfully to the tobacco industry's efforts to target young people.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. If you have any questions or would like to hear more about the important role local boards of health play in tobacco control in Massachusetts, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Dennis M. Dimitri". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dennis M. Dimitri, MD, FAAFP, Chair