

Written Testimony from Stacy Langen, RN Tobacco Prevention Coordinator for
Walsh County Health District

Re: HB 1024

Date: February 2nd, 2015

Dear Chairman Pollert and members of the House Appropriations Committee, Human Resources Division:

My name is Stacy Langen and I'm a registered nurse who has worked in Grafton, ND for over 15 years. About 16 months ago, I made a pretty significant career change, starting my new position as Tobacco Prevention Coordinator at Walsh County Health District. What an amazing opportunity it has been to change gears and work on health issues largely from a proactive standpoint instead of reactively. Also, with almost 20 years of nursing experience, I can't think of a better health issue to tackle than tobacco use which still claims 1,000 lives in ND each year (www.tobaccofreekids.org/facts_issues/toll_us/north_dakota). Prior to taking my position in Public Health, I was all too familiar with seeing the after-math of tobacco use. Now, I have had the eye-opening experience of delivering a different type of nursing care to the public, preventative care that can create positive public health changes lasting for generations to come. One of the most interesting lessons I've learned thus far in this job, is how policy promotion can so hugely impact the public and create change on a large scale.

I would like to speak to why I am in support of HB1024. With the CDC recommended level of funding to our comprehensive program at the ND Center for Tobacco Prevention and Control Policy, our local public health units can continue the important work of helping people quit tobacco use and prevent youth from ever starting. In the short time I have been in this position, I am feeling very motivated and inspired by what we can offer to our county with this funding. I would like to let you know of just a few specific areas where this funding has allowed our Local Public Health Unit to serve Walsh County. Our tobacco prevention program has:

- Assisted all Walsh County Schools in adopting Tobacco Free Grounds Policies.
- Assisted other local businesses in adopting Tobacco Free Grounds policies that go above and beyond the State Smoke Free Law – meaning no tobacco use anywhere on business grounds or in business vehicles.
- Provided cessation counseling, education and cessation medication refund services to Walsh County residents and referral assistance to NDQuits.
- Provided education to healthcare providers on policy adoption in their own clinics that would allow them to systematically and consistently connect to each and every client

they see regarding tobacco use and offer cessation referrals as needed to our Public Health office and NDQuits.

- Assisted with any questions that arise regarding the ND State Smoke Free Law, educating on adherence to and compliance of this law.
- Provided tobacco cessation and prevention education to various groups in our community such as Marvin Windows employees who are looking to quit tobacco or participate in a wellness program that offers insurance premium reductions for being tobacco free;
- Provided information to students at our local schools to learn about the addictive nature of tobacco use and its health effects, second and third hand smoke exposure and newly emerging products in the world of tobacco such as E-Cigarettes.

Lastly, I would like to touch on one more tobacco prevention and control effort. Again, it relates to policy promotion and features Tami Egeland, MetroPlains Property manager and her support of smoke-free multi-unit housing in Walsh County. Part of my job is to educate the public and housing managers on the dangers of secondhand smoke in buildings such as apartments, where renters are often exposed to secondhand smoke not by their own choice. Tami, MetroPlains Property manager, recognizes the harmful effects of secondhand smoke and has worked with me to make every new property she takes on smoke free, asking for signage and fully utilizing the tools we have offered such as model smoke-free lease agreements. When I asked her about reactions to this new smoke-free policy she noted she received excellent feedback from tenants and visitors. She stated, “even ex-smokers say they appreciate it and for some, the new policy helped them quit.” She noted that for smokers who are trying to quit, temptation is a big factor, so if the smell is gone and neighbors aren’t smoking with you, that temptation is just not there anymore. Tami also notes that from a business perspective, owners of these properties are more accepting of the benefits going smoke-free as they see the health, safety and cost benefits of implementing a smoke-free lease. She can give first hand examples of the cost of clean-up in an apartment where a smoker resided in vs. the clean-up in a non-smoker’s apartment. She described one apartment in particular that had been occupied by a heavy smoker and required extensive clean up. The walls required steaming to remove secondhand smoke residue so new primer and paint would adhere to the walls, they completely gut kitchen cabinets that were so smelly and sticky they were not salvageable, and replaced carpet and padding- all of which she stated cost the owner well over double the average cost to clean an apartment for a new renter.

In summary, I feel it is extremely important to continue the work we are doing in tobacco prevention and control at a local level. Our work is not finished. As we make strides in assisting people to quit tobacco use and prevent youth from starting, we are only faced with new challenges such as the electronic vaping devices that are becoming so popular and only add to

the problems people face with nicotine addiction. We need to keep educating, and promoting policies that will make a huge impact on public behavior – policies that create new social norms to reduce tobacco use in this great state of North Dakota.

Thank you so much for your attention and time.

Sincerely,

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