

**TESTIMONY SUPPORT OF SB2024
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Chairman Holmberg and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Good afternoon, I'm Becky Anderson, a registered respiratory therapist with a 37-year career serving the people of ND. As a respiratory therapist, I have been on the front lines of the tobacco epidemic for my entire career. My early professional years were marked by caring for people with chronic disease, especially those with COPD and lung cancer. Those at the end of their lives spent a considerable amount of time hospitalized. As an impressionable young therapist, I remember their names, I remember their faces, and I remember their stories. I remember the physical devastation and emotional burden which are the result of nicotine addiction. I have sat beside the bed of thousands of patients, trying to bring some small measure of comfort and light at a time many of them were at the end of their lives... dying way too young in their 50's and 60's, a few in their 70's. ***As they shared their stories with me, it always struck me as tragic that nicotine addiction is an epidemic which starts in childhood, some under ten years old, and 90% of tobacco users start before the age of 18.*** This is disturbing on many levels and significant because children are becoming addicted to nicotine when their brains are still developing. The result is that they become addicted easier and have a more difficult time quitting.

Healthcare professionals seek out evidence of "best practice" to build our care programs. We rely on evidence which shows the best improvement in patient outcomes at the best cost. The evidence is clear that a comprehensive State plan to reduce tobacco use is paramount in combating both the economic burden and the personal devastation caused by nicotine addiction. Tobacco is the leading cause of chronic disease and death... and it's preventable. My generation has been decimated by the use of tobacco. ND's children deserve a better future... and it's within our grasp. It's important to sustain the gains we have made through BreatheND's great work. We have impressive results. This was the legacy promised to the children of ND through the tobacco settlements and that promise should be delivered.