

March 8, 2017

Chairman Pollert and members of the House Appropriations Human Resource Division,

My name is Beth Hughes and I am a respiratory therapist and an educator. I have just a few words of my own to add to this testimony. Thank you for listening carefully.

The people of ND have given you the enormous responsibility of making thoughtful, considerate decisions regarding their safety and well being. I believe that each of you takes this responsibility very seriously.

So I ask you. Do you want to have the dubious distinction of being the first legislators in ND history to go on record as voting directly against the will of the people? Do you want to go down in history as the lawmakers who chose to dismantle a nationally recognized, efficiently run, model program that saves the lives of North Dakotans of all ages?

Do you want to go on record as saying that the number one killer of North Dakotans is not worthy of a comprehensive program (that does not use general funds) that aims to stop kids from ever starting to use tobacco?

Or instead, would you like to go on record as saying, "Yes! I want to support the vote of the people! I want to be known as an advocate for kids, and a thoughtful, considerate lawmaker who has reviewed BreatheND's comprehensive model for tobacco control and am proud to support the many people in local public health and the staff members at BreatheND who work indefatigably to make great strides, in a very short period of time, in tobacco control!

I have to tell you, I have been waiting for you folks to look at what has happened in the area of tobacco control in ND since BreatheND came into existence, and to take some credit for the strides that have been made! I have been waiting, and hoping, that, by now, you folks would be proudly touting the 50% reduction in youth smoking, the many new smoke-free public places and the increase in the number of smoke-free multi-unit housing facilities. You have a nationally recognized program of excellence that I would have thought you would be incredibly proud of!

For 37 years, I have poured my heart and soul, both through my work, and as a volunteer advocate, into this battle against Big Tobacco, its deep, deep pockets, and the death and disease it has inflicted upon too, too many North Dakotans. If you vote to defund BreatheND it will be a win for them, and a loss for all the rest of us. Is that what you want?

Dubious distinction of dismantling a successful, comprehensive tobacco control program, or great pride in representing a state that is a national leader in strong health policy? Which will you choose?