

Testimony of the Kansas Health Consumer Coalition  
Regarding HB 2737: Increasing the Rate of Taxation on Cigarettes and Tobacco Products  
Presented to the House Committee on Taxation  
Submitted by Corrie L. Edwards, MPA  
February 7, 2008

Thank you Chairman Wilk for the opportunity to speak today in support of HB 2737, a proposal to increase Kansas tobacco taxes. My name is Corrie Edwards and I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Health Consumer Coalition (KHCC) based in Topeka. The Coalition works to advocate for affordable, accessible and quality health care in Kansas.

Our Coalition supports this proposal for the following reasons:

- *Kansans need relief from rising health care costs.* The relationship between tobacco use and current health care costs are very real. With almost 80% of health care costs in Kansas attributed to chronic disease, hard-working Kansans are paying a large amount of money to treat smoking-related diseases. This is money that otherwise would have gone into a workers' pay check, fringe benefit packages, or other business investments.
- *The burdens of tobacco use in Kansas are enormous, costing approximately \$930 million dollars annually in added health care costs.* In order to begin transforming our health system, we must have a source of new funding. We have in this bill an opportunity to make serious headway in addressing the needs of Kansans who are uninsured while helping those most in need gain access to affordable health insurance. As the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" continues to expand, all Kansans are voicing their concerns about the rising cost of health care services and insurance.

It is only a matter of time before Kansas takes action to face the reality that we must be more aggressive to discourage use of tobacco. Kansas voters have regularly rated the high cost of health care insurance as a top concern. You can't effectively address this concern by avoiding a tobacco tax. We have one of the lowest tobacco taxes in the nation. The time to take action is sooner rather than later, notwithstanding the concerns of election year politics. The time to act is now.

The Kansas Health Consumer Coalition urges you to support HB 2737. Thank you for considering this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

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