**February 2018**

An Open Letter to

Florida Constitutional Revision Commissioners:

The undersigned organizations are joined in opposition to Proposal 94 because the evidence is clear – one of the most effective ways to prevent cancer, heart disease, and many other chronic illnesses is to prevent tobacco use.

In 2006, Florida voters approved a citizens’ initiative that secured funding for a comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation program. This program is mandated to follow the best practices and research published by the experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help people who smoke quit and keep our kids from ever starting. The public health community supported this initiative because the Florida legislature failed to make tobacco prevention and education a priority through the legislative process, virtually eliminating all funding.

Since the citizens of Florida secured these dollars in the state constitution, Florida has benefited from one of the best tobacco prevention and cessation programs in the country. According to the CDC, the adult smoking rate dropped from 19.3 percent to 15.5 percent in the last 5 years. Additionally, fewer young people started smoking and the youth smoking rate has decreased by 71 percent to just 5.2 percent over the past decade. All of this has been done without taxpayer dollars. These payments come from the tobacco companies who agreed to pay the states billions of dollars in yearly installments to compensate them for taxpayer money that had been spent in connection with tobacco-related diseases.

Additionally, according to the Florida Department of Health, the reduction in adult smoking rates from 2007 to 2015 resulted in about $17.7 billion in savings in cumulative smoking-related health care costs across the state. Moreover, Tobacco Free Florida has helped more than 159,000 Floridians quit tobacco over the past decade.

The program has made remarkable, quantifiable progress. And, we believe there is both a moral and economic imperative to ensure Tobacco Free Florida continues to operate based on the published best practices of the CDC. Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death, and thousands of Floridians become new smokers each year. At current tobacco-use levels, 32,300 people in Florida die annually due to their own smoking and approximately 270,000 kids now under the age of 18 will die prematurely from smoking.

It’s important to note, the tobacco industry continues to spend more than $550 million annually to market their products in Florida, which equates to more than $1.5 million every day. Because the state is being outspent by more than 24 to 1 in marketing dollars, it is crucial that Tobacco Free Florida invests in strategies proven to work. This includes dedicating one-third of the total annual budget to educate Floridians about the dangers of tobacco and direct smokers to resources that can help them quit.

As dictated by CDC guidelines, Tobacco Free Florida spends nearly 10 percent of its budget on surveillance and evaluation to ensure the program is meeting its mission to protect the people of Florida from the dangers of tobacco. Additionally, the program’s activities are reviewed quarterly by the Tobacco Education and Prevention Advisory Council and adjusted to ensure they have the greatest impact.

Today, Florida has found the perfect way to fight Big Tobacco – using its own money to tell the truth about the dangers of its products. We oppose Proposal 94 because it would divert this money from proven tobacco prevention strategies and weaken the state’s ability to fight Big Tobacco’s efforts to addict a new generation of kids in Florida.

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