

March 15, 2018

Ruth Gathunguri
Kansas Boys & Girls Clubs Youth of the Year
Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence RESIST Member
Testimony in support of HB 2231

Chairman Johnson and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing me to address the committee. My name is Ruth Gathunguri and I am a junior at Free State High School in Lawrence. I am also active in the Boys & Girls Club of Lawrence chapter of RESIST.

RESIST is a youth-led, statewide movement created to fight against the tobacco industry's influence on Kansans. We know that we are targets for Big Tobacco companies' deceitful marketing tactics and we refuse to fall into their trap. We recognize and resist against Big Tobacco's influences and we are determined to reduce tobacco-use rates in Kansas. **I am here today to ask you to think about young people like me when you consider the tobacco tax proposal under discussion today in HB 2231.**

I have seen firsthand how addictive and dangerous tobacco can be. In my extended family, I've seen how tobacco addiction controls people and messes with their values – leading parents to spend money on cigarettes when their kids' needs are being neglected. **Raising the tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products by \$1.50 will prompt 18,600 adults to quit using tobacco.** Think about all their kids and relatives who will no longer be affected by second-hand smoke.

I work with five and six-year-old students every day in at the Boys & Girls Club, and I think about what they go home to, and what will happen as they grow up. **Currently, more than 10% of high school students in Kansas smoke, and 1,500 Kansas kids (under 18) will become new, daily smokers this year.** Most young people don't have much disposable income – that's why tobacco taxes are so effective at preventing kids from starting to smoke. This legislation will prevent 13,900 Kansas kids from becoming adult smokers.

Tobacco tax isn't the only way to protect kids, but it is proven to be a very effective tool to prevent and reduce youth tobacco use. In addition, this legislation makes important investments in tobacco prevention programs. This will help the efforts like RESIST happening in communities around the state to educate young people about the dangers of tobacco, and reduce use.

You have an opportunity to protect my generation from lifelong addiction and deadly health problems. I urge your support for HB 2231.

Thank you.

<https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/kansas>