

# CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

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and the District of Columbia  
Committee on Governmental Affairs  
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Matthew Myers. I am the President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a national organization created to protect children from tobacco by changing public policies to limit the marketing and sales of tobacco to children, and by actively countering the special interest influence of the tobacco companies.

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your continued leadership on the issue of tobacco control. I, and many others, are very grateful for your willingness to stand up for our kids and take on the tobacco companies. You have a long and successful history on this issue. You led the fight to ban smoking on airline flights and most recently you have fought to ensure that the Department of Justice lawsuit against the tobacco companies is aggressively pursued. And there have been many other victories, both large and small, between those two battles.

Today's hearing is another example of your leadership. Tobacco use is a serious women's health issue, with women now accounting for 39 percent of all smoking-related deaths each year, a proportion that has more than doubled since 1965. You are right to recognize that decreasing tobacco use among girls and women would have a profound, positive impact on the health status of women.

My testimony today will focus on the history of tobacco industry marketing to women and girls as well as the latest industry marketing ploys. And I will also discuss how both an increase in cessation services and FDA regulation of tobacco products can help counter the industry's efforts.

## **Tobacco Industry Targeting of Women and Girls**

For decades, the tobacco industry has targeted women and girls with marketing and advertising. The consequences have been disastrous for women's health – over 178,000 women will die this year of tobacco-caused disease. It is not a coincidence that in 1987, twenty years after the introduction of Virginia Slims and other cigarettes targeted directly at women, lung cancer surpassed breast cancer as the leading cancer killer among women. Smoking is also a major cause of coronary heart disease among women. For many of the diseases caused by smoking, research has shown that women are more at risk than men. And women also suffer gender-specific risks from tobacco, including harm to their reproductive health and complications during pregnancy.

The tobacco companies have long understood the importance of women and girls in the overall market for cigarettes and as a source of new customers. They have conducted extensive market research on the attitudes of women and girls to better understand how to target their products and their advertising. By focusing their research on how females view themselves, their aspirations and the social pressures they face, the cigarette companies have developed some of the most aggressive and sophisticated marketing campaigns in history for reaching and influencing women and girls. The consequences of these campaigns are staggering. While smoking rates were falling among boys during much of the 1970's they rose among teenage girls. More recently, smoking among girls and young women increased dramatically from 1991 through 1997, and only since then has it begun to tail off. Smoking rates among women over 18 have barely declined over the past 10 years and women are now almost as likely as men to smoke.

## **The Early Years**

Though the slogans have changed over time, the tobacco industry's targeted marketing of women can be traced back to the 1920s. At first, women were depicted in cigarette ads as non-smoking admirers of smoking men but by 1927 advertisements with women smoking began to appear in women's magazines. One of the most famous early cigarette advertising campaigns directed at women was Lucky Strikes' "Reach for A Lucky Instead of A Sweet."

Despite the advent of targeted advertising, smoking among women did not really gain social acceptability until World War II. During that era, cigarette companies began to target women more directly, using the fashion, beauty, and sophistication themes that still continue today. The companies also used images of women in the military and the work place. For example, Camel's ad slogan during World War II was "First in the Service" and highlighted successful women in the military. While these new advertising campaigns focused on women's growing role in the American workplace, they still portrayed smoking as a stylish and feminine act. This theme of smoking as a way of achieving independence, while at the same time remaining stylish and attractive, became less popular after the war ended, but would later reappear.

### **The Advent of Women-Specific Brands in the 1960s**

The tobacco company's full-scale effort to expand the number of their female customers intensified in the late 1960s. The tobacco companies began to create specific brands of cigarettes for women to capitalize on and associate smoking with the changing role of women in society and an increased desire for independence.

With the introduction of Virginia Slims by Philip Morris in 1968, women became a major target of the tobacco industry. Cigarette ads for this brand portrayed tobacco use as a way for women to express their independence, as well as a way to be stylish and sexy with tag lines such as the infamous "You've Come A Long Way Baby." Sadly, these ads were powerful and successful. Six years after the introduction of Virginia Slims and other brands aimed at the female market, the smoking initiation rate of 12-year-old girls had increased by 110 percent. Increases among teenage girls of other ages were also substantial.

Despite Philip Morris' claims that it has changed, the Virginia Slims advertising theme has not changed much since its introduction. After its 1998 settlement with the states, Virginia Slims launched the "Find Your Voice" ad campaign that targeted ethnic women from population groups that have traditionally smoked at low rates. These ads featured strikingly beautiful women from around the world, once again linking smoking and Virginia Slims to attractiveness. A Philip Morris executive in June 2000 agreed to remove the "Find Your Voice" slogan only after being questioned in the landmark Florida smokers trial about the campaign, but rapidly replaced it with a campaign based on similar themes and messages.

The tobacco companies fully recognized the importance of women and girls as a key to their future success. For example, an internal R.J. Reynolds document stated that "Younger adult female smokers will continue to gain importance among [young adult] smokers due to their stronger incidence trend versus [young adult] male smokers."

As the tobacco companies print ads came under increasing scrutiny, the tobacco companies began to switch how they targeted kids and women. The 1990's has seen an explosive increase in the use of promotional campaigns connected with their advertising messages. These campaigns reinforce the image of smoking being stylish and sexy by offering free merchandise like clothing and CDs, and most recently, spa vacations. Studies have shown that there is a direct relationship between the awareness of and involvement with promotional items and smoking initiation by youth.

### **Targeting Women with "Low Tar" and "Light" Cigarettes**

In the 1950s, realizing that many women were concerned about the long-term health risks of smoking, the tobacco companies began advertising new filters with claims that they would reduce or even eliminate health risks. This was followed in the 1960s by tobacco company campaigns promoting "low tar" or "light" cigarettes to women as a "softer" or even "safer" option. As a 1978 Philip Morris document stated, "Today, women make up the majority of low tar smokers. Almost half of all women have switched to low-tar."

An example of tobacco industry marketing strategy can be seen in the True ad campaign from the 1970s. This campaign, which showed golfers and tennis players as well as young women, read "All the fuss about smoking got me thinking I'd either quit or smoke True. I smoke True. The low tar low nicotine cigarette. Think about it." Concerned about their health, women responded. Today, far more women than men smoke light and ultra-light

cigarettes (63 percent of women and 46 percent of men). Women are also more likely than men to switch to light or ultra-light cigarettes.

The cigarette companies continued to market these products despite being well aware that the actual or implied health claims in their ads were either misleading or entirely false. In fact, a National Cancer Institute (NCI) report indicates that the introduction of “lights” did not improve the public health and may have led to an increase in the incidence of disease caused by smoking. That is because the introduction of lights led many smokers not to quit and smokers of lights to compensate by smoking more, inhaling more deeply or blocking ventilation holes. The NCI noted that there is no evidence that smoking light or ultra-light cigarettes reduces the risk of myocardial infarction, lung cancer or COPD.

### **Cigarette Company Targeting of Women and Girls Today**

The image of smoking being tied to independence, stylishness, weight control, sophistication and power continues today.

Since signing the state tobacco settlement in November 1998, the tobacco companies have sought to convince the public and policy makers that they are now reformed and responsible. A study published in the August 16, 2001, issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine* provided evidence that the tobacco companies have not changed and are violating the promise they made in the settlement to stop marketing their deadly products to children.

As part of the settlement, the tobacco companies promised not to “take any action, directly or indirectly, to target youth.” The New England Journal of Medicine study, which examined tobacco advertising in youth-oriented magazines, found that, rather than ending or reducing their advertising in such magazines after the settlement, the tobacco companies continued to advertise at the same or greater levels in 1999 and 2000 for the three brands most popular with youth, Marlboro, Camel and Newport. In addition, the settlement has not reduced youth exposure to advertisements for these brands, with ads for each brand reaching more than 80 percent of youth in the United States an average of 17 times each in 2000. Even after Philip Morris announced it was cutting back advertising, overall advertising in magazines with high youth readership remained higher than it was before the state settlement.

There is a growing body of evidence that the tobacco companies have systematically violated both the spirit and the intent of the settlement’s prohibition on targeting children. Rather than curtailing their marketing and strictly complying with the provisions of the settlement, the tobacco companies have increased their marketing expenditures to record levels, shifted money to forms of advertising and promotion most effective at reaching kids and exploited every loophole in the settlement to continue business as usual. Magazine advertising is but a small part of the industry’s overall marketing, and previous studies have shown that other forms of advertising and promotions effective at influencing kids have skyrocketed as well.

The most recent data available from the Federal Trade Commission indicates that in 1999, the first year after the settlement, the marketing expenditures of the tobacco companies actually increased by 22 percent to a record \$8.24 billion. Much of this increase was in ways effective at reaching kids, such as high-visibility store shelf displays, discounts on cigarette brands favored by children, offers of a free pack of cigarettes if one was purchased and free gifts such as hats and lighters.

In addition to these concerns about industry marketing practices, we know that some newly introduced products are being touted as “reduced risk” and we expect that they will disproportionately affect women, just as “low tar” and “light” had the greatest impact on women who were concerned about the health risks of smoking. Brown and Williamson is marketing Advance cigarettes with the slogan “All of the taste... Less of the toxins” and Vector Tobacco has embarked on an extensive marketing campaign of Omni with ads proclaiming “Reduced Carcinogens. Premium Taste.” The tobacco companies would very much like to repeat the history of “light” and low tar” cigarettes with these new products.

### **The Policy Response: Expanded Coverage of Cessation Products and Services and FDA Regulation of Tobacco**

Senator Durbin, Congress should pass the legislation that you and Senator Brownback have introduced that would expand the availability of clinically effective cessation services under the Medicaid and Medicare programs.

Approximately 46 million Americans are already regular smokers. We need to make sure that every smoker who wants to quit isn’t prevented from doing so because they can’t afford the treatment. In fact, surveys indicate that 70

percent of smokers want to quit but have a very difficult time because nicotine is so powerfully addictive. Cessation products and services, which have been proven to be successful, should be made more readily available and more affordable.

Helping people stop using tobacco produces significant and immediate health benefits. The risk of coronary heart disease is substantially reduced within one or two years after they stop smoking. Fifteen years after they have quit smoking, the risk of death for ex-smokers is similar to the risk of people who have never smoked. And helping adults to quit smoking protects their children from the dangers of secondhand smoke, and can reduce the number of newborn babies who suffer and are put at serious risk because their mothers smoked during pregnancy and after giving birth. In addition to saving lives and improving public health, quitting smoking reduces medical costs significantly. A 1995 study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that continuing smokers experienced a 7 to 15 percent increase in hospital visits and a 30 to 45 percent increase in hospital admissions, compared to those who quit, in the 5 to 6 years of follow-up.

Significant progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of cessation programs. A 1998 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that full health insurance coverage of cessation services resulted in over twice as many smokers quitting than would quit under the standard plan coverage. The increase in the annual rate of cessation from offering full coverage would be achieved at a cost of \$328 per benefit user, which compares favorably to the average annual costs of medical treatment for hypertension (\$5,921) or heart disease (\$6,941).

S. 854, would provide much needed help to individuals enrolled in Medicare or Medicaid. Just providing assistance to pregnant women in Medicaid would result in significant health gains and reduced health care costs. While the percentage of women who smoked during pregnancy declined between 1989 and 2000, far too many pregnant women still smoke. Current estimates indicate that 12 to 20 percent of pregnant women smoke and the majority of these women are on Medicaid.

The Surgeon General has indicated that some 20 percent of low-birth-weight births are linked to smoking during pregnancy. Eliminating smoking during pregnancy could lead to a significant reduction in infant deaths. New research indicates that smoking during pregnancy may impair normal fetal brain and nervous system development. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome has also been linked to smoking. The direct medical costs of a complicated birth are significantly higher for smokers, 66 percent higher, than for non-smokers. One study estimates costs savings of between \$1142 and \$1358 for each pregnant smoker who quits.

Senator Durbin, in addition to passing your cessation legislation, Congress should act now to grant the U.S. Food and Drug Administration effective authority to regulate the manufacturing, marketing and sale of tobacco products. Legislation pending in both the House and Senate would grant the FDA the authority to:

- Ensure that tobacco products are not sold illegally to children.
- Restrict tobacco company marketing that impacts youth, including marketing aimed at girls.
- Prohibit or restrict unsubstantiated health claims or health claims that discourage people from quitting or encourage them to start using tobacco. As the tobacco industry prepares to market the next generation of allegedly “reduced risk” products, the FDA should have the authority to stop a repetition of the “lights” public health disaster that has disproportionately affected women.
- Require tobacco companies to test their product’s component parts for health and safety purposes and prohibit any health claims – whether explicit or implied - unless they are scientifically verified and would promote the public health.
- Regulate the tobacco industry in the same way that it regulates other manufacturers of products we consume, including requiring the disclosure of ingredients and additives and what they know about the health effects of their products, and the reduction or elimination of harmful components when technologically possible.

Not all legislation that has been introduced regarding FDA regulation of tobacco products would reduce tobacco use among women and girls. Not surprisingly, the legislation supported by Philip Morris is so filled with loopholes that it would not result in any meaningful change. Effective tobacco legislation has been introduced by Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA), Lincoln Chafee (R-RI), and Bob Graham (D-FL) and on the House side by Congressman Greg Ganske (R-IA), John Dingell (D-MI), and Henry Waxman (D-CA).

Congress should respond to the tobacco industry's deception and wrongdoing, including its targeting of women and girls, by acting quickly to expand access to cessation services and grant FDA effective authority over tobacco products.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today. I look forward to continuing to work with you on cessation and FDA legislation as well as other initiatives to reduce the terrible toll that tobacco takes on our nation's health.