

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

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Statement of Matthew L. Myers, President, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kid

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The St. Louis City Board of Aldermen took bold action today to protect kids from tobacco addiction and save lives by voting to prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone under age 21. St. Louis is providing strong leadership in the fight against tobacco – the No. 1 cause of preventable death – and setting a terrific example for Missouri and the nation. Increasing the tobacco age to 21 will prevent young people from using tobacco, save lives and help make the next generation tobacco-free.

The St. Louis vote adds momentum to fast-growing efforts in Missouri and across the nation to raise the tobacco age to 21. To date, Tobacco 21 laws have been passed by California, Hawaii and more than 200

localities , including New York City, Chicago, Boston, Cleveland and – closer to home – St. Louis County and both Kansas Cities. Legislation in Washington, D.C., is awaiting Mayor Muriel Bowser's signature. Many other states, counties and cities are considering such measures.

We applaud Mayor Francis Slay and Alderwoman Dionne Flowers for their leadership on this issue and the other board members who voted for this strong step to reduce tobacco use. Once the St. Louis measure is implemented, over 35 percent of Missouri's population will be covered by Tobacco 21 laws.

Increasing the tobacco age to 21 will reduce tobacco use among youth and young adults – age groups when nearly all tobacco use begins and that are heavily targeted by the tobacco industry. We know that about 95 percent of adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21. The increase in the tobacco age will help counter the industry's efforts to target young people at a critical time when many move from experimenting with tobacco to regular smoking. It will also help keep tobacco out of high schools, where younger teens often obtain tobacco products from older students. A [2015 report by the prestigious Institute of Medicine](#) (now called the National Academy of Medicine) concluded that increasing the tobacco sale age to 21 would yield substantial public health benefits.

Tobacco use kills nearly half a million Americans and costs the nation about \$170 billion in health care bills each year. In Missouri, the annual toll is more than 11,000 deaths and over \$3 billion in health care costs. Increasing the tobacco age to 21 is a critical step in reducing and eventually eliminating tobacco's terrible toll.

