

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES, EASIER.

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Honorable Lake County Board of Supervisors,

Thank you for considering the adoption of two commercial tobacco prevention ordinances next week. In this letter I will just be focusing on the Tobacco Retail License Ordinance (TRL) but please know we are strongly supporting both initiatives. Commercial tobacco use continues to be the #1 cause of preventable disease, death, and disability in the US. 480,000 people die from smoking each year. Commercial tobacco kills more people each year than alcohol, STIs, car crashes, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined. The annual national death toll of commercial tobacco is equivalent to 914 No-Survivor Crashes of a large jetliner EACH YEAR.

Smoking takes the lives of 40,000 Californians annually. Lake County is the most adversely affected by commercial tobacco than any other county in the state. And, our county's smoking rate is higher than the top three highest state-wide smoking rates in the US: West Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas. Think about that for a minute.

Our health providers, educators, and advocates have been working hard to provide education and cessation support for victims of commercial tobacco-use. Still, without local regulation and local control like the TRL being proposed, Big Tobacco will continue to regulate our community, determine our health outcomes, define our health inequities.

Our need for commercial tobacco prevention policies directly ties to our overall health as smoking-related illnesses are our top killers in Lake County- heart and lung disease and cancers. Smoking is even a major factor in type-2 diabetes. And teen nicotine use is demonstrated to set teens up for substance use vulnerability as well, something that also devastates our community.

We all know, health disparities are stark between Lake County and some of our adjacent neighboring counties. We've heard it over and over that our county health outcomes lag behind some of our immediate neighbors who have strong local retail regulation and smoke-free policies. We don't have the Sierra Nevada or a Continental

Divide between us. Yes, there are demographic factors, and the issue can be complex. Still, many in our county work and shop in these healthier communities. Why should a few miles determine why more people get sick and die younger here? This doesn't have to be the case. Progressive regulation is a solution, and we CAN and SHOULD be in the driver's seat to grab this low-hanging fruit.

By passing a Tobacco Retail License ordinance Lake County has an opportunity to take some monumental steps to close a 15–20-year gap between itself and the progress of adjacent Mendocino and Sonoma County's commercial tobacco retail regulation movement.

Mendocino County Unincorporated	TRL	2004
Mendocino County Unincorporated	TRL Strengthened	2020
Mendocino County Unincorporated	TRL Strengthened	2022
City of Ukiah	TRL	2005
City of Ukiah	TRL Strengthened	2023
City of Willits	TRL Strengthened	2003
County of Sonoma	TRL	2016
County of Sonoma	TRL Strengthened Vape Ban	2024
Sebastopol	TRL with Vape Ban	2020
Windsor	TRL	2018
Windsor	TRL Strengthened Vape Ban	2021
Cloverdale	TRL (Municipal Code)	2017
City of Sonoma	TRL	2015
Healdsburg	TRL	2017
Petaluma	TRL with Vape Ban	2021

In under-regulated rural communities where Big Tobacco calls the shots and reigns supreme, critics of prevention tout the sacred mantra of “adults’ rights.” Fortunately, Lake County’s proposed TRL does not impinge on adults’ rights. It does, on the other hand, provide an evidence-based solution tried and tested for lowering teen nicotine initiation rates by around 16%. Our parents have a right to demand retailers follow the law and not sell to their teens. School administrators have a right to demand their students not be sold to from the smoke shop or convenience store near their campuses. Currently in our county state laws are seldom enforced and penalties laughable. Our chronic teen vaping epidemic is enabled, in part, by a major source of products being brick and mortar stores selling directly to kids. Even if critics of intervention don’t want to face the ethical issues related to this, let’s look at the financial impacts to Lake County. Commercial tobacco negatively impacts California’s budget to the tune of tens of \$Billions of dollars. We do not fully know the financial impact on Lake County but with the

highest smoking rate in California, our hospitals and clinics show living examples of the exorbitantly expensive medical impact on our community members whose bodies are harmed and lives ended early for Big Tobacco's profits.

Here's a breakdown of the cost to California taxpayers each year:

- \$9.8 B Health Care Costs
- \$1.4 B Lost Productivity
- \$3.8 B Cost to the Medi-Cal Program
- \$41 Million Tobacco Waste Clean Up

Hopefully "Adults' Rights" won't come up in debate over these solutions but if it does, consider a moment as to the majority of Lake County residents that don't smoke... do Lake County residents have a right to ask not to have to shoulder the huge financial burden of unregulated commercial tobacco-use? Passing a TRL is a fiscally-sound solution that should lower smoking rates and thus the financial burden of adverse health effects related to smoking forced on the shoulders of taxpayers each year.

And finally, probably one of the biggest arguments for regulating commercial tobacco is that stores are already required to abide by strict and consequential laws around alcohol and even food sales. The new, emerging disposable e-cigarette products popular with Lake County teens such as Elf Bar pack a whopping 590 cigarettes worth of nicotine per unit. Teens we engage with locally share that they are going through one of these units every two days and can't quit. The Federal government does not limit nicotine levels in e-cigarettes/vapes. As Big Tobacco fights and coerces Washington in all its ways to block sensible regulation at the federal level, as California does not adequately enforce state law, this is the time for Lake County to flex its resourcefulness and grit and step up to protect its own through a self-supporting fee-based licensure program. This will finally provide the tools for law and code enforcement to tackle the problem of rampant sales to teens and the chronic vaping epidemic here that is fueled by illegal sales. Yes, it's tempting to get analytical about what the Federal government and State of California should be doing. Unfortunately, the time for analysis paralysis is over. In the meantime, action now, and action locally and action boldly is essential to keep the next generation of replacement customers who are teenagers from getting hooked on products they are simply getting by walking into local stores and buying.

Thank you, each of you, for proposing bold and sound and community-based solutions,



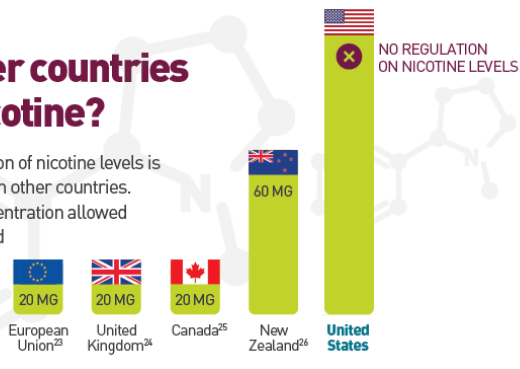
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How do other countries regulate nicotine?

The U.S.'s lack of regulation of nicotine levels is dramatically different from other countries. The highest nicotine concentration allowed in the European Union and the United Kingdom is 20 mg/ml (2%).



[nicotine-and-young-brainhttps://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco](https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco)



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