June 18, 2008

Dear XXXXX:

Every day in the United States 4,000 young people under the age of 18 try smoking for the first time. An estimated 1,140 become daily cigarette smokers. Without decisive action by Congress, susceptible children will continue down this path to someday become part of a gruesome statistic: 400,000 Americans who die each year as a result of their own cigarette smoking. With the smoking rate among high school students higher than that of adults, smoking prevention efforts clearly are doing the least where they are needed the most—among children and young adults.

This situation is alarming and intolerable to parents, teachers, administrators and families across the country. Because we share a common commitment to protect and nurture America’s children we urge you to pass H.R. 1108, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which would give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) broad authority over tobacco products and their marketing.

Some of the ways H.R. 1108 will help protect our children and young adults from tobacco include:

- Limiting advertising, marketing and sales of tobacco products to children;
- Ban on the sale of cigarette flavored varieties;
- Requiring more meaningful warning labels;
- Mandating disclosure of the ingredients in tobacco products and providing authority for the FDA to remove harmful ingredients;
- Banning use of descriptive items on cigarette packs such as “Mild” or “Low Tar”.

H.R. 1108 provides a national approach to insulating children from the $36-million-a-day advertising initiatives of the tobacco industry. The effectiveness of cigarette advertising in convincing young people to smoke is well documented. Research shows that young people are three times more susceptible to tobacco advertising than adults and that cigarette advertising is more powerful than peer pressure in convincing children to try smoking.

H.R. 1108 will also ban all outdoor tobacco advertising within 1,000 feet of schools and playgrounds. In addition, all remaining tobacco brand sponsorships and entertainment events will be banned. The bill will also restrict vending machines and self-service displays to adult-only facilities and will limit advertising in publications with significant youth readership to black-and-white text only. H.R. 1108 will also give the FDA the authority to require information about the contents of tobacco products and the research that goes into creating new products. Having tobacco product ingredient information will
give the FDA the knowledge it needs to require changes in existing or future products that could affect how enticing they are to youth.

In addition, H.R. 1108 will prohibit the use of candy flavorings, such as strawberry, vanilla and mint in cigarettes. The legislation will also require warning labels to be changed to emphasize stronger visual warnings on cigarette packaging. All advertising or labeling claims such as the product is “low tar” or “light” will also be banned under FDA regulation of tobacco. These terms can lead young adults to believe that the brand they are using is less dangerous to their health. Once passed, H.R. 1108 will require the FDA to evaluate all health claims on a pre-market basis.

We certainly recognize the responsibility of parents and educators to guide children away from smoking. Nevertheless, families and schools are outmatched by the resources of the cigarette industry. Passage of H.R. 1108 will put the full force of Congress behind this effort and we cannot wait any longer for Congress to act while more and more children and young adults try tobacco products.

With a bi-partisan majority in Congress sponsoring H.R. 1108, it’s time we get this legislation passed before the Congressional calendar runs out. Our school children depend on it!

Sincerely,

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