September 16, 2008

Senator XXXXXXXX
United States Senate
XXXX Senate Office Building
Washington, DC XXXXX

Dear Senator XXXXXXXX:

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 the Senate, susceptible children will continue down this path to someday become part of a gruesome statistic: 400,000 Americans 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 S. 625, 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. The House overwhelmingly passed this historic legislation and now that Congress has returned from recess we urge the Senate to do the same.

Some of the ways S. 625 will help protect our children and young adults from tobacco include:

- Limiting advertising of tobacco products within 1,000 feet of schools;
- Restricting vending machines and self-service displays to adult-only facilities;
- Banning the sale of flavored cigarette 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”.

S. 625 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.
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 S. 625 will put the full force of Congress behind this effort. We cannot afford to wait any longer, while more and more children and young adults try tobacco products.

With a bi-partisan majority in the House passing H.R. 1108, it is time for the Senate to pass S. 625 before the Congressional calendar runs out. Our school children depend on it!

Sincerely,

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