

November 3, 2024

Dear Belchertown Board of Health and Belchertown Board of Selectmen,

On behalf of Belchertown Public Schools Drug-Free Communities program, I am submitting a letter of support in implementing a Nicotine Free Generation Policy in Belchertown, MA. As the Program Director/Project Coordinator of BPS DFC, I understand that Nicotine is as addictive as heroin and causes release of the pleasure chemical dopamine and other neurotransmitters in the brain within minutes of the first puff, which reinforces continued tobacco use. Tobacco users get hooked because of that pleasant feeling or "rush" and often continue to use nicotine to prevent withdrawal symptoms. As the Chair of Belchertown Overcoming Adversity Together and the DFC Program Director, it is my passion and professional responsibility for keeping our youth and community safe. Preventing tobacco product use among youth is critical to reducing tobacco use in adulthood and specifically, decreases significant health problems, including respiratory illness, decreased physical fitness and potential effects on lung growth and function. Every day, 2,500 children under 18 years of age try their first cigarette, and more than 400 of them will become new, daily smokers. Half of them will ultimately die from their habit.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services (*Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S Department of Health and Human Services; 2012) the following statement was made:

Because cigarette smoking typically begins during adolescence, tobacco use is often described as a "pediatric disease." Nearly 90 percent adults in the United States who smoke daily began smoking by age 18, and 98% by age 26. Nicotine is highly addictive; initiation of smoking during adolescence is linked to persistent smoking in adulthood and the many adverse health effects caused by smoking. Further, exposure to nicotine during adolescence may harm normal brain development, which continues until the age of 25. Specifically, nicotine exposure during adolescence may impair development of brain regions involved in attention, learning, and impulse control, and it may prime the brain for addiction to other drugs

As you can see by the above statement, tobacco use is a childhood choice and adult addiction. Tobacco may be the only legal substance that kills, even if it is used as recommend by the manufacturers. It is imperative that we consider passing a Nicotine-Free Generation Policy, as our children's futures and lives depend on it. They depend on you.

Sincerely,

Kris Hoag
Belchertown Public Schools
Drug-Free Communities Program Director
Belchertown Overcoming Adversity Chair