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National Report: Rhode Island Ranks 41st in Protecting Kids from Tobacco

Tobacco Companies Spend \$63 to Market Products for Every \$1 Rhode Island Spends on Prevention

Washington, D.C. – Rhode Island ranks 41st in the country in funding programs to prevent kids from smoking and help smokers quit, according to a national report released today by a coalition of public health organizations. Rhode Island is spending \$397,908 this year on tobacco prevention and cessation programs, which is just 3.1 percent of the \$12.8 million recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

In contrast, tobacco companies spend an estimated \$25.2 million to market their deadly and addictive products in Rhode Island each year. That means tobacco companies spend \$63 to promote tobacco use for every \$1 Rhode Island spends to prevent it. This giant gap is undermining efforts to save lives and health care dollars by reducing tobacco use, the No. 1 cause of preventable death in the United States, the report warns.

Other key findings for Rhode Island include:

- Rhode Island will collect \$189.1 million this year from the 1998 tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes, but will spend only 0.2 percent of it on tobacco prevention programs.
- In Rhode Island, 8 percent of high school students smoke, and 500 kids become regular smokers each year. Tobacco claims 1,800 lives and costs \$640 million in health care bills annually.

The report, titled “Broken Promises to Our Children: A State-by-State Look at the 1998 State Tobacco Settlement 17 Years Later,” was released by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, American Heart Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Lung Association, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Americans for Nonsmokers’ Rights and Truth Initiative.

The report assesses whether the states have kept their promise to use a significant portion of their settlement funds – estimated to total \$246 billion over the first 25 years – to fight tobacco use. The states also collect billions of dollars more each year from tobacco taxes.

Rhode Island has implemented several effective measures to reduce tobacco use, including a strong, statewide smoke-free workplace law and a cigarette tax of \$3.75 per pack, the second highest in the country. However, the state has a poor record of funding tobacco prevention and cessation programs, providing roughly 3 percent of what the CDC recommends.

“The tobacco companies are as relentless as ever in marketing their lethal products, so it is critical that Rhode Island step up its efforts to protect our kids from tobacco addiction and help smokers quit,” said Matthew L. Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “While Rhode Island has made solid progress in reducing tobacco use, it is still putting children at risk and costing taxpayers money by refusing to fund tobacco prevention programs that are proven to save lives and health care dollars.”

Nationally, the report finds that:

- Most states fail to sufficiently fund tobacco prevention and cessation programs. The states will collect \$25.8 billion this year from the tobacco settlement and tobacco taxes, but will spend less than two percent of it (\$468 million) on tobacco prevention programs.
- The \$468 million the states have budgeted for tobacco prevention is a small fraction of the \$3.3 billion the CDC recommends. Only one state – North Dakota – is funding tobacco prevention programs at CDC-recommended levels.
- States with well-funded, sustained tobacco prevention programs continue to deliver impressive results. Florida, with one of the longest-running programs, reduced its high school smoking rate to just 6.9 percent this year, one of the lowest rates ever reported by any state and a 75 percent decline since 1998. North Dakota, which ranks first for the third year in a row in this report, cut smoking among high school students by nearly half from 2009 to 2015 (from 22.4 percent to 11.7 percent).

Insufficient prevention funding makes it difficult for states to combat the pervasive marketing of Big Tobacco. Nationwide, tobacco companies spend \$9.6 billion a year – more than one million dollars every hour – to market their products, according to the Federal Trade Commission. Industry tactics that entice kids include:

- Widespread advertising, prime product placement and price discounts in stores, which make tobacco products appealing and affordable to kids.
- Ads in magazines with large youth readership, such as *Sports Illustrated* and *Rolling Stone*.
- Candy- and fruit-flavored tobacco products such as small cigars and electronic cigarettes. E-cigarette companies have drastically ramped up their marketing efforts in recent years as well. Recent data show that youth use of e-cigarettes has skyrocketed, and that high school boys now smoke cigars at about the same rate as cigarettes.

Tobacco use kills more than 480,000 Americans and costs the nation about \$170 billion in health care expenses each year.

The full report and state-specific information can be found at www.tobaccofreekids.org/reports/settlements.

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