



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
APRIL 9, 2019

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TOBACCO 21 LEGISLATION GAINS SENATE APPROVAL
Texas 21 applauds passage but has concern with military exemption

The Texas Senate on Tuesday took a stand for the health and lives of Texas youth by voting to stop the sale of cigarettes, e-cigarettes and other tobacco products to Texans younger than 21. But the bill was passed with a military exemption that would continue to allow service members to purchase these products at age 18. The Texas 21 coalition, which represents 91 public health organizations, strongly opposes this exemption.

Senate Bill 21 by State Affairs Committee Chair Sen. Joan Huffman (R-Houston) had widespread bipartisan support in the 31-member Texas Senate with nine other authors and six co-authors. In addition, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has made raising the tobacco age [one of his legislative priorities](#).

Tobacco use is a threat to the health of young troops and to the country's military readiness, [according to data compiled by Texas 21](#). Many current military smokers – 36 to 40 percent – report starting tobacco use after joining the military. More than \$1.6 billion each year is spent by the U.S. Department of Defense on tobacco-related medical care, increased hospitalizations and lost days of work.

“Military leaders themselves recognize the toll tobacco takes on troop readiness and on the military health care system and are actively taking steps to reduce tobacco use in the military,” said Claudia Rodas, southern region director, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “Texas 21 will be working with legislators to help them understand the importance of including the military in tobacco 21 legislation. Our goal is a tobacco 21 law that protects all young Texans, including those who are willing to die to protect our country.”

Said Charlie Gagen, director, grassroots – Texas, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, “This law gives Texas an important tool to keep tobacco out of the hands of our youth and prevent them from a lifetime of addiction, and our jobs are not over. The military exemption fails to protect the service members who put their lives on the line for our freedoms, and we must do more to keep them healthy.”

In the House, tobacco age legislation House Bill 749 by state Rep. John Zerwas, M.D., (R-Richmond) was passed unanimously by House Public Health Committee on March 25.

To date, [13 states](#) have voted to raise their tobacco sale ages to 21, along with at least 450 cities and counties across the country, including San Antonio, Leon Valley and Kirby in Texas. Legislation passed by Arkansas, California, Maryland, Utah and Virginia include military exemptions.

A [Texas 21 poll](#) found that more than two-thirds of Texas voters support raising the minimum legal tobacco sale age to 21.

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About 95 percent of smokers start before age 21. In Texas, 7.4 percent of high school students smoke and over 10 percent use e-cigarettes, while 10,400 kids become daily smokers every year. Nearly half a million (498,000) Texas children alive now will ultimately die prematurely from smoking if current trends continue.

In addition, a [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report](#) released in February found a 78 percent increase in high school students using e-cigarettes in one year, raising the number of middle and high school tobacco users to almost 5 million and erasing past progress in reducing youth tobacco product use.

For more information on the tobacco 21 issue – including numerous fact sheets – visit www.texas21.org.

The Texas 21 Coalition includes [91 health organizations](#), including the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Texas Academy of Family Physicians, Texas Medical Association, Texas Pediatric Society and Texas Public Health Coalition. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center is present as an educational resource only. More information can be found at www.texas21.org. Follow the Coalition on Facebook at [/texastobacco21](#) and Twitter at [@TexasTobacco21](#).

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