



For Immediate Release

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Latest Report Shows Alarming Increase in Youth Access, Tobacco Use

D.C., June 2008 – More DC children are buying their own tobacco products, according to a recent study. The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), shows a significant increase from recent years in the number of youth in the District who have purchased their own cigarettes at a local store or gas station. In 2007, nearly 30 percent of the youth in the District were able to purchase their own cigarettes. This is up significantly from the previous study in 2005 when 24 percent claimed to have purchased their own cigarettes.

The increase is no surprise to youth living in the District. For 20 year old Precious Kibbler, the Youth Council Member for the youth outreach program, Team Champions, access to tobacco for youth has always been a problem in her neighborhood in Ward 8.

“I started smoking when I was 8 years old because I used to buy cigarettes for my mom. I never had a problem purchasing them. Today is no different. The stores only care about making that dollar and rarely ask for proof of age.”

Also alarming is a significant increase since last year among students who smoke cigars. Nearly 40 percent more of DC children are smoking cigars and cigarillos now. Cigarillos, like Black and Mild, have become more popular in the inner city because they are sold individually with a lower tax rate than a regular pack of cigarettes and most are candy and fruit flavored, which attract youth. Young consumers often choose the \$2.50 pack of Black and Mild over a \$5.00 pack of cigarettes, because the tax on little cigars is significantly less than cigarettes.

However, the tax on the consumer’s health is much higher. The cost of treating tobacco related illnesses in the District has a ticket price of \$224 million every year, including \$72 million in Medicaid dollars. Kibbler, a former smoker, knows the impact of smoking cigarillos too well, which is the reason why she has since become an advocate to keep tobacco products out of the hands of youth.

According to Kibbler, “Smoking one Black is like smoking 5 cigarettes at one time.”

The significant findings in this recent report are a clear indication that youth access policies need stronger enforcement.

“Reducing youth access to this devastating product is essential as part of our overall comprehensive efforts to fight Big Tobacco by reducing their profits,” said Rolando Andrew, Chief Executive Officer of the American Lung Association of DC. “And we obviously need to take a look at the tax structure for these little cigars because of its low price compared to cigarettes,” Andrew continued.

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the District, as well as across the nation. In fact, the District has some of the worse tobacco-related health statistics, including a significant increase in oral cancers and high rates of heart disease. Each year, 720 District residents die from tobacco use and 500 District children become new smokers daily.

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