

To: Board of Education

From: Marcel Harmon, board president  
Janelle Martin, past chair, LiveWell Lawrence Tobacco Free Work Group

Re: LiveWell Lawrence "Tobacco 21" Initiative

Date: September 6, 2016

Background:

The "Tobacco 21" Initiative is a nationwide movement to encourage governmental entities to adopt ordinances (or their equivalents) to raise the legal minimum age for sale of all tobacco and nicotine products to age 21. Thus far, over 160 cities in 12 states including New York City, Kansas City, Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, and San Francisco, and the entire states of Hawaii and California, have taken this important step in protecting our children.

For years, adolescent smoking rates have been coming down, although nearly one in five high school seniors still uses tobacco. Now, however, adolescents' use of e-cigarettes, nicotine vapor devices, hookahs and small cigars has gone up dramatically, threatening to completely erase a decade of progress.

During the years from ages 18-21, youthful experimentation often accelerates into daily use. It is a time when the adolescent brain is highly vulnerable to the effects of a powerful addictive agent like nicotine. Exposure during this period may result in permanent neurological receptor changes that lead to a lifetime nicotine habit and resulting illness. Raising the nicotine/tobacco age also better protects younger teens, as 90% of those who provide cigarettes to kids under 18 are themselves under 21. As a result, raising the tobacco sales age to 21 has been shown to reduce high school smoking by over 50%.

Current Report:

Tobacco is a major risk factor for many diseases including heart disease, stroke and cancer, all of which are leading causes of death in Douglas County. It is estimated that, of the approximately 900 graduating seniors from Douglas County high schools last year, about 140 of them are or will become regular tobacco users, and 46 of them will eventually die of a tobacco-related illness. LiveWell Lawrence believes raising the tobacco sales age in Lawrence and other Douglas County communities will reduce youth tobacco initiation and is asking the USD 497 Board of Education to endorse "T21" for Lawrence, Kansas.