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September 18, 2017

Aloha and Mahalo to members of the Maui County Council:

My name is Jeny Bissell, 50-year resident of South and West Maui. I present to you my testimony as a private citizen. I am a Registered Nurse for over 30 years and have been working for the State Department of Health in various capacities and settings. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify and contribute to our collective efforts towards sound social and environmental policies to protect the health and safety of our population especially our most vulnerable population such as the very young, women and men of reproductive age and older adults.

I ask you to consider passage of the proposed bill submitted by the Honorable Councilmember Yuki Lei K. Sugimura to amend Chapter 8.20, Maui County Code, to prohibit smoking (and vaping) in vehicles when persons under the age of eighteen are present. The enactment of this bill will join our sister counties of Kauai and Hawaii, 8 states in the Continental U.S. and commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Children and youths deserve to have a smoke free, safe and healthy environment while they are being transported to and from home.

The dangers of smoking have been well-documented, have been widely explained and accepted, and that smoking in cars exposes passengers, especially children, to high levels of toxic secondhand smoke. The Surgeon General's Report published in 2014 with 50 years of rich data documented that there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke and thirdhand smoke.

In the same year, a study looking at National Health Interview Survey data found that a little more than a quarter of American adults reported having two or more chronic conditions. The chronic conditions considered in this study included arthritis, asthma, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), coronary heart disease, diabetes, hepatitis, hypertension, stroke, or weak or failing kidneys, and emerging oral health diseases. While Hawaii comes in lower (except oral health diseases) than the national average, more than a fifth of adults in the state had multiple chronic conditions. The study also found that women were more likely to be affected by multiple chronic conditions than men were. There is strong evidence that nicotine/tobacco products, secondhand and now thirdhand smoke causes and/or exacerbates many of these chronic health conditions. As the chairperson and a member of pediatric fatality review panel, maternal mortality review panel and other fatality and near fatality review panels in our state, cancer and congenital anomalies are the leading causes of pediatric mortality and morbidity.

Peak levels of secondhand smoke from smoking in a car can be up to 10 times greater than the level which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers hazardous air quality, even when the window is down.

Research suggests that "gaseous and particulate components of tobacco smoke absorb into the upholstery and other surfaces inside a car, then off-gas back into the air over the course of many days, weeks, or months exposing passengers to toxins long after anyone actually smoked in the car. Such nicotine pollution constitutes third-hand exposure." Environmental scientists also noted that "because the average American spends more than an hour a day driving in a car, exposure to pollutants covering car surfaces add up.

I strongly support the passage and enactment of this environmental, health and social policy. It is the right thing to do and we will find that the return on investment will be huge.

Mahalo

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