May 24, 2018

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.  20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.  20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As your Subcommittee moves forward with the FY 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations bill, we urge you to allocate at least $216.5 million to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Office on Smoking and Health (OSH). The work that OSH does is critical to ending the tobacco epidemic that takes far too many lives and exacts an enormous financial toll on the nation’s economy.

While we have made great strides in reducing tobacco use, there is still more work to be done. Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death in the United States. Every year, it kills more than 480,000 Americans and is responsible for an estimated $170 billion in health care costs. More than 60 percent of these health care costs are paid by government programs such as Medicare and Medicaid.

OSH plays a critical role in reducing the death and disease caused by tobacco by funding activities that help to prevent youth from starting to use tobacco and help adult tobacco users to quit. For example,
OSH funds the highly successful national media campaign Tips from Former Smokers. This media campaign has motivated about five million smokers to make a quit attempt, helped approximately 500,000 smokers to successfully quit, and saved at least 50,000 people from premature death since its inception in 2012. The campaign is highly cost-effective with a cost of just $393 per year of life saved, far below the $50,000 that is an accepted benchmark for cost-effective public health programs.

OSH also provides funding to states for quitlines, which provide telephone-based counseling to help tobacco users to quit and, in some states, provide tobacco cessation medications. Smokers who use quitlines are at least two to three times more likely to succeed in quitting compared to those who try to quit on their own. OSH provides funding and technical assistance to health departments in all states to help maintain and enhance tobacco prevention and cessation programs at the state and community level. OSH also conducts critical research about the prevalence of tobacco use and alerts policy makers about trends in tobacco use such as the dramatic increase in e-cigarette use among adolescents in recent years.

We oppose the FY 2019 President’s budget request to eliminate OSH. It would eliminate the Tips media campaign, eliminate dedicated funding for state quitlines and state tobacco control programs, and eliminate or seriously weaken CDC’s ability to collect data on tobacco use and identify emerging threats. While the President’s budget request says states could use funding from a newly created America’s Health Block Grant to reduce tobacco use, there is no guarantee that states would do so, and states would almost certainly have to substantially cut back existing tobacco programs. Even with a $500 million America’s Health Block Grant, the President’s budget request would reduce overall funding for CDC’s chronic disease prevention programs by $138 million, a nearly 13 percent cut. We appreciate that your Subcommittee rejected the President’s block grant proposal last year and urge you to reject it again this year.

Investing in effective tobacco prevention and cessation programs will save lives and reduce health costs from treating tobacco-related diseases. As you develop appropriations legislation for FY 2019, we respectfully request that CDC’s Office on Smoking and Health receive at least $216.5 million, which would restore funding to its FY 2015 enacted level, so it can continue its important tobacco prevention and cessation work.

Sincerely,