The Honorable Jared Huffman
California Assembly
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849, Room 3120
Sacramento, CA 94249-0006

Re: AB 1738 (Huffman) - SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Huffman:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing to state our support for AB 1738 (Huffman), which would help reduce tobacco use by requiring health care plans and health insurance policies to cover tobacco cessation treatment.

First 5 LA oversees the Los Angeles County allocation of funds from Proposition 10, which added a 50-cent tax on tobacco products sold in California. Funds raised help pay for health care, education and child development programs for children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families. First 5 LA’s mission is to increase the number of young children who are physically and emotionally healthy, safe and ready to learn. For more information, please visit www.First5LA.org. One of our policy goals is to promote reductions in drug, alcohol and tobacco use by parents and caregivers in order to ensure the health of young children.

Health experts have noted that tobacco use causes substantial damage to unborn infants, including reduced birthweight and learning delays. The California Environmental Protection Agency declared secondhand smoke to be a “toxic air contaminant” and in 2006 estimated that secondhand smoke was responsible for 21 cases of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), 1,600 cases of low birth weight infants, 4,700 preterm deliveries, 31,000 episodes of asthma in children, 400 cases of lung cancer, and 3,600 cardiac deaths each year in the state.

AB 1738 would help parents and caregivers who want to reduce tobacco use by requiring health care service plans and health insurance policies to provide coverage for at least two courses of treatment within a 12-month period for all tobacco cessation services. These services would be restricted to those rated “A” or “B” by the U.S Preventive Services Task Force and would include telephone, group, or individual counseling; FDA-approved prescription medications; and FDA-approved over-the-counter medications.
The California Health Benefits Review Program (CHBRP) stated that, “There is clear and convincing evidence that AB 1738 would contribute to the reduction in premature death from smoking-related conditions such as cancer, low birth weight infants, and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.” The agency also noted that a decrease in smoking would result in fewer low birth weight infants, thus saving the state additional medical costs, as those children tend to require more medical care later in life.

The ability to access smoking cessation programs through health care plans and health insurance policies would help many working parents and caregivers quit tobacco use, creating a smoke-free environment for young children and pregnant women. For these reasons, we support the passage of AB 1738.

Sincerely,

Craig A. Steele
Interim Chief Executive Officer
First 5 LA

cc: California Assembly and Senate - Los Angeles County delegation