

May 12, 1998

The Honorable Carl Levin
United States Senate
459 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Levin:

On behalf of the American Society of Internal Medicine (ASIM), I urge your support for bipartisan and comprehensive legislation to radically reduce consumption of tobacco products by America's children. In spite of data that show tobacco use is responsible for 1,300 deaths per day and is the single leading preventable cause of disability and death in the United States, the problem of underage tobacco use is rapidly worsening. If current trends are not reversed, more than five million children alive today will eventually die because of tobacco-related disease.

Internal medicine is the nation's largest medical specialty. On a daily basis, internists see the devastating health consequences for their patients of smoking and the use of "smokeless" tobacco products.

The time is right for the Senate to build on the foundation provided by the settlement agreement reached last June by the tobacco industry and 40 state attorneys general. The measure introduced by Senator John McCain and approved last month by a 19-1 vote of the Senate Commerce Committee, S. 1415, has emerged as the best vehicle for creating a national policy that will protect the public health.

ASIM urges you to support enactment of legislation, based on S. 1415, with the following improvements:

- A price increase of \$1.50 per pack over two to three years should be substituted for the current proposal of \$1.10 over five years, which is too low to adequately drive down youth tobacco use rates.
- Higher penalties should be paid by companies that fail to meet tobacco use reduction goals among youth. Such penalties should not be capped and should be company specific to act as the greatest deterrent possible.
- Adequate funding must be dedicated to tobacco-related public health programs such as counter marketing, research and tobacco use cessation.
- The provisions of the bill to protect individuals from the hazards of environmental tobacco smoke need to be strengthened. States should not be allowed to opt out of the clean indoor air provisions.

In addition, ASIM believes that it should not be necessary for Congress to provide the tobacco industry with any special liability protection, such as the \$6.5 billion annual cap on payments that is currently in S. 1415, in order to enact comprehensive legislation to protect the public from the health risks of tobacco products. ASIM urges your support for passage of S. 1415 with these changes.

Sincerely,

Alan R. Nelson, MD
Executive Vice President