**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 16, 2018**

**CONTACTS: Natalie Talis, 202-868-4813**

**Mina Radman, 202-296-5469**

**Virginia Kids to ‘Kick Butts’ on March 21**

***State Leaders Challenged to Create First Tobacco-Free Generation***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Kids in Virginia will unite against tobacco use on March 21 as they join thousands of young people nationwide to mark Kick Butts Day. More than 1,000 events are planned across the United States for this annual day of youth activism, sponsored by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. (See below for a list of local events.)

On Kick Butts Day, kids encourage their peers to be tobacco-free, reject tobacco companies’ devious marketing and urge elected officials to help make the next generation tobacco-free.

This year, Kick Butts Day is focusing attention on the progress the U.S. has made in reducing youth smoking and the actions needed to create the first tobacco-free generation. Since 2000, the national smoking rate among high school students has fallen by 71 percent (from 28 percent in 2000 to 8 percent in 2016). However, the fight against tobacco is far from over:

* Tobacco use is still the No. 1 cause of preventable death in the U.S., killing over 480,000 people and costing about $170 billion in health care expenses each year.
* Tobacco companies spend $8.9 billion a year – $1 million every hour – to market tobacco products in the U.S., often in ways that appeal to kids.
* Electronic cigarettes have become the most popular tobacco product used by kids – nationwide, 11.3 percent of high school students use e-cigarettes compared to 8 percent who smoke cigarettes. The latest trend with teens is JUUL, an e-cigarette that looks like a computer flash drive and comes in flavors like mango and fruit medley.

In Virginia, tobacco use claims 10,300 lives and costs $3.11 billion in health care bills each year. Currently, 8.2 percent of Virginia’s high school students smoke.

On Kick Butts Day, kids and health advocates are calling on elected officials to implement proven strategies that make up a “roadmap to a tobacco-free generation.” These strategies include tobacco tax increases, comprehensive smoke-free laws, raising the tobacco sale age to 21, well-funded tobacco prevention programs and banning the sale of flavored tobacco products.

“On Kick Butts Day, kids are celebrating the progress we’ve made to reduce tobacco use and building momentum to get us across the finish line,” said Matthew L. Myers, President of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. “Elected leaders in every state can help create the first tobacco-free generation by supporting proven strategies to prevent youth tobacco use.”

On Kick Butts Day, kids join in creative events ranging from classroom activities to educate their peers about the harmful ingredients in cigarettes to rallies at state capitols.

In Virginia, activities include:

Members of the **Alleghany Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)** at **Alleghany High School** in **Covington** will illustrate the deadly effects of tobacco use by dressing up as zombies, displaying tombstones on the school lawn, and creating a pledge banner for peers to sign and say NO to tobacco. Time: 12 PM. Location: 210 Mountaineer Drive, Covington. Contact: Amanda Grimm (540) 863-1700.

Members of the **Focus on Response and Education to Stay Healthy (FRESH) Coalition** and **Communities Helping Improve Local Lives (CHILL) Youth Task Force** in **Rocky Mount** will set up a booth outside of Kroger with information about the dangers of tobacco use and visit local businesses. Time: 10 AM. Location: 400 Old Franklin Turnpike, Suite 110, Rocky Mount. Contact: Tony Wright (540) 814-1198.

Members of **Girls Incorporated** of **Bristol** will trace chalk body outlines to represent the number of people who die each year in the U.S. from tobacco. Time: 4:30 PM. Location: 613 Highland Avenue, Bristol. Contact: Nicole Cullop (423) 742-0232.

**Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD)** at **Powhatan High School** will display tobacco-free messages in fences and air out big tobacco’s “dirty laundry.” Students will commit to be tobacco-free by constructing a pledge wall. Students who sign will have a chance to win prizes courtesy of the **Rural Substance Abuse Awareness Coalition**. Time: 11 AM. Location: 1800 Judes Ferry Road, Powhatan. Contact: Kirsten Lightner (804) 647-0757.

All events will take place March 21 unless otherwise indicated. For a full list of Kick Butts Day activities in Virginia, visit [www.kickbuttsday.org/map](http://www.kickbuttsday.org/map). Additional information about tobacco, including state-by-state statistics, can be found at [www.tobaccofreekids.org](http://www.tobaccofreekids.org).