



General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church

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James Winkler, General Secretary

H.R. 1108 The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Act Testimony, October 3, 2007

Good morning, Chairman Pallone, Representative Deal and Members of the Subcommittee. I am James Winkler, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church. As you may know, The United Methodist Church is the third largest religious denomination in the United States, with more than 8 million members worshipping in nearly 35,000 local congregations in the United States.

I am also the Chair of *Faith United Against Tobacco*, a broad-based coalition of faith leaders. Since it was founded in 2002, *Faith United Against Tobacco* has grown to include over 20 national faith denominations and organizations. In addition to the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church, our coalition includes the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, the National Council of Churches in Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, the Seventh-day Adventists, the American Region of the World Sikh Council, and the Islamic Society of North America. Other broad-based groups, such as Church Women United and the Health

Ministries Association, which represents thousands of faith community nurses across the country, have also joined *Faith United Against Tobacco*.

I appreciate this opportunity to testify in favor of H.R. 1108, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, life-saving legislation to authorize the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate tobacco products. We have made enactment of the tobacco legislation introduced by Representatives Henry Waxman and Tom Davis one of our top legislative priorities for the 110th Congress. This legislation is long, long overdue, and, on behalf of United Methodists and the many members of the other faith groups united in our coalition, I strongly urge you to take action now and to enact this critically important legislation with all due speed.

In addition to our national effort to convince Congress to enact the FDA regulation of tobacco legislation now before you, *Faith United Against Tobacco* has worked successfully across the country to enact tobacco control measures such as increased tobacco taxes, full funding of tobacco prevention programs, and smoke-free workplace legislation. In Indiana in 2005, for example, there was a very serious effort to dramatically cut funding for that state's landmark tobacco control program. A group of faith leaders, led by United Methodists, Southern Baptists, and faith community nurses, formed the Hoosier Faith and Health Coalition and took the lead in preventing these cuts from happening, which has saved many Hoosiers, particularly children, from tobacco addiction. Similar collaborations exist in other states, including Alabama, Kentucky, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas.

Our focus at the federal level has always been on enacting legislation to give the FDA authority over tobacco products. Recently, twenty-four national faith leaders from our coalition sent the attached letter to every Member of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, urging support for the FDA legislation. The signers of this letter represent very diverse groups, including Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faith denominations, whose members include tens of millions of Americans from every part of the country. I think it is also important to note that the 24 leaders who signed this letter widely diverse positions on other important social and political issues. But we are, and we will remain, united in our desire to reduce smoking, especially among children, and in our commitment to the enactment of this legislation authorizing the FDA to regulate tobacco products.

Many Americans now know the terrible statistics about the toll of tobacco on our families—over 1200 Americans die each day, every day from tobacco use. Another 1200 will die tomorrow; and the day after that; and every single day of the year. In all, 400,000 Americans die every year from tobacco-caused illnesses; hundreds of thousands of others suffer every year from tobacco-caused illnesses such as lung cancer and heart disease; and every day over 1,000 of our children become addicted to this deadly product.

For us in the faith community, there are tragic faces attached to these frightening statistics. Every day clergy in our faith groups assist families in burying mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers who die absolutely preventable and premature deaths caused by tobacco addiction. And, more often than not, these addictions began at a young age. We, then, are left with the difficult task of trying to comfort their grieving survivors. Every one of these people who dies of

tobacco use leaves behind families and friends who miss them very much and suffer their untimely and tragic loss.

I speak this morning from personal experience. My father, uncle, and brother are United Methodist clergy. All of them have dealt with church members over the years who have become addicted to tobacco and each of them have dealt directly with the negative effects of cancer on their congregations and the families who have suffered from this product.

Literally, millions of Americans have died before their time, often in their prime—at the peak of their careers, with a spouse and children at home, and with many other responsibilities and joys before them. The families of America must not continue to be lured toward a future that is cut short due to lack of knowledge about the ingredients and addictive nature of tobacco. Men and women deserve to know the toxic chemicals rolled into every cigarette. Young sons and daughters deserve to enjoy their youth without being confronted with tobacco marketing tailored to their age. Like the many Members of Congress from both parties and across the political spectrum who are cosponsoring this legislation, the faith groups in our coalition join America's public health community in viewing FDA regulation of tobacco as a critically needed tool to reduce tobacco use. This legislation would allow the FDA to prevent tobacco companies from adding ever more deadly and addictive ingredients; require larger and more informative health warnings; prohibit candy-flavored cigarettes; prevent tobacco sales to underage children; and limit advertising and promotion of tobacco products that lure children into a deadly habit. Like many of you, we find it incredible that the FDA can ensure the safety of everyday items like cold

medicines, cookies, dog food and nicotine cessation products, but has no authority over tobacco, a product that causes more preventable deaths than any other.

The United Methodist Church is unwavering in its declaration to ensure protection for all of God's children especially from harmful and addictive products. Our Faith Coalition is simply asking that tobacco products be subject to the same common sense consumer protections that apply to other products. Why should manufacturers of nicotine cessation products that help people quit smoking be subject to FDA regulation, but not the products that kill over 400,000 Americans every year? No one wants excessive government regulation. What we are asking for is not overly burdensome; it would simply assure the protection of consumers, particularly our children. There is broad consensus in the faith community, both conservative and liberal, that this product must be regulated, and that is why we support this bill.

We also support this bill for moral and spiritual reasons. Our faith traditions inform us that our bodies are gifts from God and, therefore, should be treasured and treated with dignity. This means, among other things, that tobacco companies should not be allowed to entice our children to pollute their bodies. While each adult person bears responsibility for whether he or she chooses to engage in tobacco use, responsibility also falls upon those in authority, who have the power to end tobacco deception, to end the marketing of these products to children and to significantly reduce the illness and death that these practices can produce.

Our faith traditions teach us that it is morally wrong to know the good that should be done and not do it. It is also morally wrong to leave the most impressionable and vulnerable among us, our

children, unprotected from the tobacco enticements that confront them. And so, we in the faith community believe that those who are called to positions of leadership and power have a moral imperative to exercise their power to safeguard the men, women, and children of our country from falling into the pitfalls of tobacco abuse.

I find it unconscionable that Congress, knowing the deadly effects of tobacco use, continues to leave tobacco companies virtually unchecked, left to use their own discretion to determine what carcinogenic chemicals to include in their products. I find it unconscionable that Congress, knowing that the overwhelming majority of adult smokers began their habit as minors and without the full knowledge of the dangers of tobacco would do nothing more than call unfortunate the tobacco companies' marketing targeted at children.

Almost 10 years ago, in 1998, Congress debated comprehensive tobacco control legislation but failed to enact anything. In 2004, the Senate overwhelmingly passed legislation virtually identical to the bill before you, but it was killed in a conference committee. And on August 1, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions passed this bill. Throughout this time tobacco companies have continued to spend billions of dollars every year marketing their deadly products to children and, as a result, far too many high school students smoke and far too many people will die prematurely from tobacco-caused diseases.

All members of *Faith United Against Tobacco* believe that the United States Congress must do a better job of protecting our children from tobacco addiction and the suffering of tobacco-caused illness and death. As political leaders, you have an obligation, both morally and as guardians of

our citizens to act to protect our children and families. You have the means to curb the cycle of allurements and addiction, of disease and death, caused by tobacco. You owe it to the families of America to do so. We, therefore, urge you to act quickly to enact H.R. 1108, bipartisan legislation to provide the Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate tobacco products.

Chairman Pallone, Representative Deal, and other Members of the Committee, I thank you for permitting me to testify this morning. I will be happy to entertain any questions.