The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to provide them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible. The Massachusetts Medical Society strongly supports comprehensive prevention, education, cessation, and efforts to prevent morbidity and mortality associated with tobacco use. In pursuing those aims, the MMS strives for health equity.

As such, MMS wishes to be recorded in support of S.1809/H.2870, An Act Protecting Youth from Nicotine Addiction, filed by Senator Chandler and Representative Decker, which would increase the tax on cigarettes by $1.00 to $4.51 and increase the tax on cigars from 40% of wholesale to 80% of wholesale. Increasing the price of tobacco products through taxation is a proven strategy for reducing youth tobacco use. Massachusetts’ low youth cigarette smoking rate is due in part to its pattern of consistently raising cigarette taxes every few years, which has not been done since 2013. It is time to do so again.

Over ninety percent of adult smokers started using tobacco before they were eighteen years old. Eighty percent of youth smokers will become adult smokers and one-half of adult smokers will die prematurely from tobacco-related diseases. Without strong prevention policies, 103,000 Massachusetts kids alive today will die from smoking. Tobacco and nicotine use costs Massachusetts more than $4 billion annually in healthcare costs. Cigars, currently taxed at 40% of wholesale, are still in kids’ price range. Cigars are sold in corner stores and other locations accessible to kids and are sold at low prices. Taxing these relatively inexpensive cigars at the more appropriate rate of 80% of wholesale will help make them less attractive to young people.

Price increases on tobacco products are one of the most effective ways to protect young people from becoming addicted tobacco and nicotine. Tobacco taxes are a key strategy in the fight to make sure that young people in the Commonwealth grow up without the burden of tobacco and nicotine addiction.

The MMS urges the Joint Committee on Revenue to report S.1809/H.2870 out of Committee favorably.