



September 26, 2019

Houston City Council
900 Bagby Street
Houston, TX 78002

Honorable City Council Members,

The use of smokeless tobacco remains a serious blot on the game of baseball. Smokeless tobacco use by Major League Baseball (MLB) players endangers the health of impressionable youth who follow their lead, as well as the players themselves. We are excited that Houston has the opportunity to join the growing list of cities coast to coast that are making baseball completely tobacco-free, by passing **(insert ordinance number and title, if applicable)** to prohibit all smokeless tobacco products – such as dip, chew and snuff – at baseball and other sports stadiums and fields across the city.

Passage of this ordinance will make clear that the health of our youth is a top priority. Such legislation will send a simple and powerful message to kids: baseball and tobacco don't mix. America's pastime should be about promoting a healthy and active lifestyle, not a product that addicts, sickens and kills.

Even as cigarette smoking has declined dramatically over time, smokeless tobacco use has not followed that same trend. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2017, 7.7 percent of high school boys (and 5.5 percent of all high school students) reported current use of smokeless tobacco products. A different survey found that high school athletes use smokeless tobacco at nearly twice the rate of non-athletes, and smokeless tobacco use among athletes increased 11 percent from 2001 to 2013, even as smoking rates dropped significantly. Among male high school athletes, smokeless tobacco use was particularly alarming at 17.4 percent in 2013. Each day, more than 1,000 kids age 12-17 use smokeless tobacco for the first time.

Major league players are idolized by millions of our young people who watch baseball and see players, coaches and managers using tobacco. Baseball must stop creating images that associate tobacco use with masculinity and athleticism – when in fact its use causes increased death and disease. The obvious solution is for the league and the players association to agree to a ban, but they have not done so. Since baseball has been unable to address this ongoing threat to kids across the country, it is now up to



cities with major league teams – like Houston – to step up to the plate and protect our kids by prohibiting the use of smokeless tobacco at all baseball venues.

Two shocking events in 2014 should have been enough to convince MLB and its players to remove the indelible stain smokeless tobacco has left on the game. In June 2014, Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn died at age 54 after a long battle with salivary gland cancer, which he attributed to his longtime use of chewing tobacco. Two months later, Red Sox pitching great Curt Schilling, only 47 then, announced his treatment for oral cancer that he said was “without a doubt, unquestionably” caused by 30 years of chewing tobacco.

Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death in the United States. Public health authorities, including the U.S. Surgeon General and National Cancer Institute, have found that smokeless tobacco use is hazardous to health and can lead to nicotine addiction. Smokeless tobacco contains at least 28 cancer-causing chemicals and causes oral, pancreatic and esophageal cancer – as well as other health problems. Smokeless tobacco use increases the risk of death when users have heart attacks or strokes.

We are up against some powerful opposition. Smokeless tobacco companies spent \$759.3 million on marketing in 2016 (the most recent year available), more than five times the amount spent in 1998. Smokeless tobacco use in baseball reinforces the industry’s message that teen boys can’t be real men unless they chew. We need to do our part to counter this deceptive messaging.

The proposed ordinance does not dictate what players can do on their own time in their personal lives, although we would urge players to quit using tobacco for their own health. Baseball stadiums, however, are workplaces and public places. It is totally fitting to limit the use of a harmful substance in that type of venue. While players are on the job – on the field or anywhere in their stadium – they have a responsibility to set the right example for kids. We recognize that this change will pose a challenge for some, so the ordinance specifies that it will not become effective until after the current season is over.

What we are urging is not unprecedented. The minor leagues, the NCAA and the National Hockey League have already instituted prohibitions on tobacco use. Major League Baseball is lagging on this. So for the sake of the children and families who love baseball and look up to their heroes, and for the sake of the health of the players themselves, we ask that you quickly pass Houston’s Tobacco-Free Baseball ordinance and help us take the next step toward creating a tobacco-free national pastime.

The campaign to eliminate tobacco from baseball has already made some significant strides. Half of MLB stadiums (15 of 30) are now completely tobacco-free as a result of state and local laws prohibiting use of all tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco, at baseball venues. MLB cities covered by such laws include Anaheim, Boston, Chicago,



Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Oakland, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, Tampa Bay (St. Petersburg), and Washington, D.C.

By passing this ordinance to take tobacco out of Minute Maid Park, you can join the fight to prevent young people from ever starting down the road to addiction, disease and premature death. Our goal is to encourage the players and the league to do what's right for players, children and the game of baseball, and finally Knock Tobacco Out of the Park. Our kids can't wait any longer.

Sincerely,

American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Heart Association
American Lung Association
Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
Harris County Medical Society
Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Houston Methodist
Memorial Hermann Health System
Texas Children's Hospital
Texas Pediatric Society



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