

# NEWS FROM H.O.T.

Help Overcome Tobacco in Kentucky



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Student Health Advocates Rally at the State Capitol**

*Youth Display 642 Pairs of Shoes Symbolizing  
Deaths Caused by Tobacco Use in Kentucky*

Frankfort, KY – More than 100 Members of the statewide youth advocacy group H.O.T. (Helping Overcome Tobacco) converged on the State Capitol today to highlight the problem of tobacco use in the Commonwealth. The youth held a news conference calling on Kentucky General Assembly to pass legislation proven to prevent and reduce tobacco use among Kentucky youth.

The youth displayed 642 pairs of shoes on the steps of the Capitol, representing the number of Kentuckians who die each month from tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke.

“We don’t want to be the ones to fill the shoes of those killed by the tobacco epidemic,” said Matt Langstaff of East Carter High School. “We don’t want to just give facts and figures, we want our leaders to know that we care about our health and our future. Kentucky is not doing enough to keep kids from smoking and help people quit. These shoes represent real people who were tricked by the tobacco companies into a lifetime of addiction, but we can change that by getting serious about reducing tobacco use in Kentucky.”

“It’s shameful that Kentucky still has one of the highest smoking rates in the country. Almost one out of every 4 Kentucky kids smoke, and if we don’t do more to stop it, 100,000 Kentucky kids alive today will die prematurely from tobacco-related diseases,” said Daniel Dunford of Burgin Independent High School.

“Tobacco companies spend an estimated \$535 million a year in Kentucky alone to market their products and its working. Over 7,600 Kentucky youth become regular smokers each year. Other states are passing laws proven to help solve the problem. Why not Kentucky?” said Sabrina Dye of Butler County High School.

State Representative David Watkins (D-Henderson) has introduced a bill to raise Kentucky’s 30 cent tax, currently one of the lowest in the nation, by 70 cents. The new tax of \$1.00 would still be below the national average, which is \$1.11 and climbing. “Public policy solutions including increased tobacco taxes, local smoke-free laws and full funding for tobacco prevention and cessation programs have been proven to work. We really need to aggressively combat tobacco use in Kentucky and that’s why I’ve introduced my bill. I hope my colleagues in the General Assembly will join me in keeping Kentucky kids healthy and tobacco-free.”

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