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May 18, 2009

Senator Edward M. Kennedy  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy:

As the leading medical professional society for physicians involved in cancer treatment and research, the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) is pleased that the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions will consider S. 982, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, your legislation to give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority over tobacco products.

Tobacco use, and in particular cigarette smoking, is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. Tobacco products are responsible for 30% of all cancer deaths, and specifically, cigarette smoking is responsible for 87% of lung cancer deaths. This is particularly sobering, because 9 out of 10 people who are diagnosed with the disease ultimately die because of it. Lung cancer is the leading cause of death from cancer in both men and women.

Perhaps less well appreciated is the significant link with tobacco use and a spectrum of other cancers. The overwhelming majority of mouth, throat, esophageal, and bladder cancer are directly linked to tobacco use. In addition, tobacco use is associated with a host of other diseases (among them emphysema, coronary heart disease, stroke, osteoporosis, and reproductive health complications), and thus adversely affects health in the broadest of terms.

This legislation will help prevent the next generation of young Americans avoid a deadly, life-long addiction to tobacco use. Because 90% of adult smokers start in their teens, or earlier, restricting children's access to tobacco is vital. We applaud your leadership on this important public health legislation and look forward to working with you to ensure its passage by the Senate.

Sincerely,

Joseph S. Bailes, MD  
Chair, Government Relations Counsel

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