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City substantially increases fine for retailers who sell tobacco to minors or who sell single cigarettes

(Milwaukee, WI) – Last week, the Milwaukee City Attorney's Office and Milwaukee's Municipal Judges took a bold step to help restrict youth access to tobacco products by increasing the fine retailers face for selling tobacco products to minors from **\$260 to \$691**. The judge also increased the fine for retailers caught selling single cigarettes, also known as "loosies," to \$691.00. The fine for selling single cigarettes had been \$181 for a first offense and \$321 for second and subsequent offenses.

"The Municipal Court's decision to nearly triple the fine amount for the sale of cigarettes to minors and single cigarettes is consistent with the City of Milwaukee's ongoing efforts to abate the illegal sale of cigarettes," said Nick DeSiato, assistant city attorney.

"These are important steps in reducing youth access to cigarettes," said Lorraine Lathen of the Wisconsin African American Tobacco Prevention Network (WAATPN).

The WAATPN has been working to help restrict the sale of single cigarettes and reduce youth tobacco use rates by recruiting youth to participate in the WI Wins Program -- a state-funded program designed to restrict youth access to tobacco products.

According to WI Wins data for 2017, the youth access rate in the City of Milwaukee for tobacco products was 19 percent, but in some zip codes, such as 53206, it was as high as 55 percent.

"Perhaps this increase in fines will help move us closer to the first generation of tobacco-free kids," Lathen said.

According to data from the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, every day 3,000 people under the age of 18 use tobacco for the first time with 700 become daily tobacco users. Loosies and other tobacco products make it easier for young people to become addicted to tobacco, Lathen added.

DeSiato said he hopes the increased fine will also help motivate more retailers stay in compliance with the law. Those who are caught selling to minors are given the opportunity to enroll in a diversion program from the City Attorney's Office and Milwaukee Police Department's called MARTS (Milwaukee Achieving Responsible Tobacco Sales).

Businesses are given the opportunity to enroll in MARTS in lieu of receiving a ticket, according to DeSiato.

"If they successfully enroll in MARTS (which costs less than the citation), stay clean for six months, attend our licensed premises class and pass four undercover mystery shops they are not cited for the underlying violation," DeSiato said.

The program has been offered to over 250 businesses city-wide and those who have enrolled decreased their police activity by 20 percent compared to those who didn't, he added.