

Chair Nathanson, Members of the Committee:

On behalf of a broad spectrum of the K-12 education community, we submit this letter in support of efforts to increase Oregon's tobacco tax and to include inhalant delivery systems in that tax structure.

Anecdotally, we know that vaping is becoming an increasing issue on our school campuses, as we regularly hear about the rise in use from our various membership. But this is also clear when looking at the data. According to Oregon's 2017 Healthy Teens Survey, roughly 8% of 11th graders smoke cigarettes, and 13% use inhalant delivery systems, otherwise known as "vape pens." Additionally, twice as many middle schoolers have tried vaping as have tried cigarettes.

Other data is equally startling. New CDC and FDA data show that nationwide one in five high school kids used e-cigarettes in 2018, a 78% increase from 2017. From 2013 to 2015, e-cigarette use in 11th graders increased from 5% to 17%. Additionally, nearly 20% of those who simply try an e-cigarette go on to become regular users. Economic modeling from the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network shows raising the tax on tobacco and e-cigarettes will prevent 19,000 kids from smoking and help 4,000 youth quit.

We know that there have long been challenges with students using nicotine and tobacco products at school; however, vaping poses some unique challenges for building staff. Vaping can be done in a relatively discrete manner given the lack of obvious smoke and the fact that many of these devices do not look substantially different than the pens, pencils, and USB drives that students bring to class.

Our concern, however, is not only about the issues of tobacco use on school campuses, but more broadly what this means for the future health outcomes of our students. Research tells us that when individuals make it to adulthood without having started using tobacco products, they are less likely to ever pick up the habit.

In recent decades, we have made great strides in reducing the number of students who take up smoking while in high school, and it seems that the rise of vaping is bringing us back to square one. While many students are put off by traditional cigarettes, we are still working to help students understand that vape products, which come in flavors such as bubble gum, strawberry, and vanilla, are not free from similar health concerns. We believe that the kid-friendly flavors and innocuous product design are part of the reason that students are increasingly likely to try vaping in high school.

Studies show that raising the price of tobacco and nicotine products is the single most effective tool to reducing use. A 10% increase in price will lead to a 7% decrease in youth consumption. Out of concern for our students, we support increasing the tobacco tax and finally including vaping products under that umbrella.

Thank you.

