



WASHINGTON COUNTY OREGON

February 5, 2020

To: Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care
From: Tricia Mortell, Washington County Public Health Administrator

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and Committee Members:

My name is Tricia Mortell, and I am the Public Health Administrator for Washington County. Washington County Public Health and our Board of Commissioners are very concerned about the increasing rates of tobacco use among youth resulting from the advent of inhalant delivery devices and more specifically from flavored products. I'm here today to provide support for including additional products beyond e-cigarette flavors only and expressing general support for tobacco retail licensure in SB 1577.

Although inhalant delivery systems are one of the most prevalent products used by youth, they are not the only ones. The tobacco industry continues to develop more products to entice youth, after all they need to have a steady supply of consumers. But all of us need to be proactive and protect the health and well-being of our community's youth. Nearly 29% of youth under 18 in Washington County reported trying an e-cigarette or vaping product of some sort, and 16% reported using one of these products within the last 30 days. This is a very alarming trend and the trend is going in the wrong direction. Additionally, 60% of youth who were surveyed don't believe there is any risk/harm to using these products. We know that when the perception of harm goes down, use goes up.

SB 1577 is not comprehensive enough - it only addresses inhalant delivery systems and no other flavored combustibles like cigarillos and smokeless tobacco. These products are often advertised and sold at a very low cost, again attracting youth purchases. At a recent youth town hall, we heard directly from youth that they know very well that all these products are targeting them, but peer pressure is very strong. If juuling falls out of favor, another product comes along and becomes the "in thing". They also shared how much they see the effects of nicotine addiction in their friends on a daily basis: anxiety, irritability, restlessness, difficulty concentrating, depressed mood and how hard the struggle is when trying to quit using. Is this the burden we want our youth to carry? Nicotine is very addictive, right up there with cocaine and heroin. It is appalling that we have let this happen to our youth over the past decade.

The reason that flavored products have enticed more youth to try these products is the fact that they mask the harshness of tobacco. Flavors like pineapple, strawberry, grape, root beer, peach, mango and even menthol can't just be seen as an additive, they are a vehicle for initiation. And we have no idea of the long-term health impacts of these products. We are supportive of prevention strategies that work. We applaud the Oregon legislature for passing tobacco 21. But we need legislation that provides us with more tools to combat this alarming rise in youth tobacco use and nicotine addiction. We need a flavor ban across all products, and we need to license the businesses selling these products to ensure the best enforcement system possible.

Washington County is currently working with our Board of County Commissioners and our local city officials to create an ordinance that would license tobacco retail establishments. We are ready to stand up for youth and would support the conversations happening about a state-wide approach. We applaud the conversations happening here in Salem over this session and support a comprehensive approach to preventing youth access to a lifetime of addiction.

We understand there are a lot of moving parts and amendments to this issue. We urge the committee to take the time needed to get this policy right and do right by our youth.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.
Sincerely,

Tricia Mortell, RD, MPH
Washington Public Health Manager



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