

March 3, 2025

Re: Senate Bill 702



Dear Chair Reynolds and members of the Senate Early Childhood and Behavioral Health Committee,

I'm Jennifer Little and I'm the Director of Klamath County Public Health. I'm writing in support of Senate Bill 702, to ban all flavored nicotine products in Oregon.

My first job in public health was as the tobacco prevention coordinator, and the issues I was dealing with 10 years ago are the same issues I am still fighting today—flavored tobacco that's hooking our kids on nicotine and hindering adults' attempts to quit. Tobacco use continues to be the number one cause of preventable disease and death in this country.

I'm not going to spend time on statistics about youth vaping and costs of tobacco-related healthcare. We've been sounding the alarm with rising numbers for over a decade, so I'll forgo using data today—others can do that.

Instead I'll tell you what I'm seeing at the local level.

I have a tobacco "candy jar" filled with flavored tobacco products with flavors like banana split, watermelon, tropical, chocolate. Yes, adults like candy flavors too, but these flavors and colorful packaging give the illusion of fun and safety for youth. And quite frankly, flavors make smoking a more pleasurable experience, which in turn keeps adults addicted too.

My staff and I get calls from concerned parents that their kids are using vapes, which are becoming harder and harder to identify because they are made to look like thumb drives and are easily hidden. Parents and teachers are contacting us because students are sneaking vapes into classrooms and smoking in the bathrooms and buses.

Here's the scariest and saddest part of the story. We used to just get calls from junior high and high schools. We're now getting phone calls from the elementary schools. I'll say it again. Elementary schools!

I have a bin full of confiscated vape pens from the schools. As you are aware, schools are drug free properties, and they are doing the best they can to help students stay drug free. Sadly, they are at their wits end and students are being suspended due to repeated vaping offenses during school.

What's worse is these students often think vapes are safe, but when my prevention coordinator meets with them in small groups, they admit they are addicted. They also say it would be gross to use flavorless vapes.

Nicotine addiction in youth can lead to a lifetime of addiction, and when cravings strike, they are unable to concentrate on their schoolwork.

So, what seems like a minor issue—flavored tobacco products, a legal substance for adults to purchase—actually has tremendous negative effects on academic achievement and lifelong health outcomes.

This has to stop! Education isn't enough. We need strong policy change to rid our state of deadly tobacco products that are addicting our youth and killing our community members.

We need to stand up against big tobacco and quit listening to their deceitful excuses. Also, votes on this bill will count toward your individual scores on Coalition of Local Health Officials' 2025 Public Health Scorecard.

Support Senate Bill 702, which will ban flavored tobacco in Oregon.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Little

Jennifer Little, MPH
Director