

Regarding SB 702, Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Anderson, members of the committee:

I am Dr. Elizabeth Tomczyk. I am a practicing Dentist and the Clinical Site Director at Oregon Health and Sciences University School of Dentistry General Practice Residency Program. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 702. I have seen the dangers of tobacco use, both in its conventional form and other newer nicotine delivery mechanisms such e-cigarettes, in my work as a dentist. I can tell you that tobacco use has devastating effects on oral health. The effects may not always be immediate, but over time, tobacco use causes irreversible damage.

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Oregon, and nearly all tobacco use begins during youth and young adulthood. E-cigarettes are the most popular tobacco product among Oregon teens, which makes it a potential "gateway" to more harmful tobacco products. E-cigarettes can deliver massive doses of nicotine, which put young users at greater risk for addiction.

While I am not a pediatric dentist, I see daily the outcome of starting tobacco products early. Patients who come through the hospital clinic with oral and lung cancer often report "pack years" that far outstrip their age. Frequently they tell me they started young.

Tobacco use is directly linked to gum disease making the gingiva more susceptible to infection. The bacteria in the mouth thrive in an environment created by tobacco products, resulting in gum inflammation, bleeding, and, if untreated, tooth loss. New flavored tobacco products, both smoked and oral (like Zyn tabs which have special detrimental effect on gingival tissues) increase the incident of dual nicotine use.

The nicotine and tar in tobacco products stain teeth, leading to yellowing. This not only affects appearance but also weakens the tooth enamel over time, which increases the risk of cavities. The longer tobacco use continues, the harder it becomes to restore the natural whiteness of teeth, often requiring costly and painful dental procedures.

Flavored tobacco products make it harder for our youth to understand or recognize these long-term consequences to their health. In dentistry, we use flavored products – in toothpaste and fluoride – to convince kids to put stuff in their mouth they wouldn't otherwise – to make them think it's a treat. That's the same approach the tobacco industry is using with flavored products now – except with lifelong negative impacts.

Oral health is closely interconnected with overall health, and the problems caused by tobacco use extend beyond the mouth. In my capacity as Attending Dentist for the GPR program at OHSU I often see patients with lung cancer or oral cancers in my practice at the hospital. Treatments for cancers caused by tobacco use can make it dangerous to remove infected teeth. These outcomes of long-term tobacco use, started at a young age, make oral health very difficult to manage as well as affecting the rest of the body. The oral health of our kids matters—don't let tobacco take it away. I urge your support for Senate Bill 702 to end the sale of flavored tobacco products.