

Support for Senate Bill 702 – Restricting the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Dear Chair Reynolds and Members of the Committee,

As a pediatric cardiologist in Salem, OR, I write to express my strong support for Senate Bill 702, which would prohibit the sale of all flavored tobacco products. This bill represents a crucial step in preventing youth tobacco use and safeguarding the health of Oregon's children.

Flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes and e-cigarettes, are intentionally designed to appeal to young people. Their sweet, fruity, and minty flavors mask the harshness of nicotine, making it easier for adolescents to start using and quickly become addicted. As a physician, I have seen firsthand how nicotine addiction harms developing brains, leading to long-term cognitive and behavioral health challenges. The tobacco industry knows this and continues to target our youth, putting profit over public health.

While some suggest this is a less harmful alternative to combustible tobacco, this has neither been proven nor does it imply safety. My practice has demonstrated these clearly cause harm. I saw a child with pre-existing serious heart and lung disease who started vaping only to have severe decompensation of their condition to the point of needing hospitalization and have a serious risk of sudden cardiac arrest. Upon cessation of vape, their clinical condition improved and returned to baseline.

Furthermore, research shows that at the cellular level, e-cigarette vapor triggers the same pathological changes that contribute to lung diseases such as COPD and emphysema, as well as heart disease, stroke, and cancer. The full impact of vaping-related diseases has yet to emerge, primarily because e-cigarettes have only been widely used for about 10 to 15 years. Even the longest-term users, who started roughly 18 years ago, have not yet reached the timeframe in which these diseases typically manifest. We can't afford to wait until this disease emerges to take action, leaving a generation unnecessarily addicted to tobacco products.

By passing SB 702, Oregon can take a bold stance to protect our children from the dangers of nicotine addiction. This legislation will help reduce youth initiation, improve health outcomes, and prevent another generation from becoming dependent on tobacco.

I urge you to support SB 702 and prioritize the well-being of Oregon's children. Thank you for your time and commitment to public health.

Sincerely,

James A. Bishara, MD, MBA, FAAP

President of the Oregon Pediatric Society

State Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics