

Hello Chair Reynolds, Vice Chair Anderson, members of the committee my name is Haoua Dogo, and I am writing you today on behalf of Upstream Public Health & The Tobacco Free Coalition of Oregon to support Senate Bill 702 to end the sale of flavored commercial tobacco products.

I first want to talk about what has motivated me to do this work and engage young people in Commercial Tobacco Prevention. I am 27 years old and have lived in Portland since I was 4 years old. I started smoking little cigars and mentholated cigarettes when I was around 14-15 years old and now I have been a smoker almost 50% of my life. That is what is pushing me to quit and also bring awareness to the predatory marketing practices my generation has faced. I was born in the generation that witnessed the legal age limit for tobacco go from 18 to 21 years old. So when they changed the age limit we had already been smoking.

My story is not that much different from the story of Marie Evans, who was given cigarettes by an RJ Reynolds executive outside of her low-income housing/project apartment complex. From that day she became a lifelong smoker and died when she was in her 50s. Her family sued Newport and received a settlement.

I was first introduced to tobacco when I was working at the Horn of Africa food booth at Washington Hempfest. We were working 12 hour days with two long breaks, however we weren't busy and my "uncle boss" told me to go take a break for 2 hours.

There aren't many places to take a break that would have been away from all the activities but there were cool vendors and things happened so I explored the fairgrounds.

As I explored the fair grounds there was a young lady with an Ipad who stopped me and asked me if I was interested in looking at their products. I said yes – She didn't ask me how old I was, or anything other details pertaining to legality. Prior to this encounter I always thought cigarettes and tobacco were gross and smelled yucky. However, this one was different. It was all black (super cool), sleek, and the packaging was amazing! They had different flavors but the one I liked the most was the mint – it smelled so good and I knew I had to try it. I had two hours to kill so I continued exploring, I got all types of goodies including vape pens both tobacco and marijuana, pipes, and those good smelling cigarettes. I even had my friend go back and get some more because they were only giving them out free for first time customers. I traded her a couple of pipes for them.

Until this day I still remember the taste of the cigarettes and how good and smooth it felt when I first hit it. As I write this testimony, I am thinking about that cigarette.

When I got back home I did exactly what big tobacco wanted me to do – I gave them away to all of my friends and we smoked them together. None of them had ever smoked a cigarette before but they thought they were cool and that they smelled really good. Everyone said that I was cool because I had the best smoking cigarettes and they all wanted more.

When I got home I hid my vape and my cigarettes but both fortunately and unfortunately – my father found them. He asked me what this was and if I was smoking and I told him it was just a pen.

This is why I urge you to support SB 702 – every year that we delay the policy we are allowing tobacco companies to create a new generation of Marie Evans. They will not stop until there are millions of Marie Evans across the world.

I was also a part of the generation that witnessed the first hookah bar, Lux, that allowed 18 year old (still legal at the time) to go. This was the first club scene that our age group got to partake in and we went every single weekend. Prior to this not many folks or even my peers knew what hookah was. Now, all of my friends are regular hookah smokers and the people who I saw at the hookah bar as a kid are still the same people at 007 and Mr Hookah. Hookah is single handedly the most used commercial tobacco product for African Muslim communities.

This is why I urge you to support SB 702 – every year that we delay the policy we are allowing tobacco companies to create a new generation of Marie Evans. They will not stop until there are millions of Marie Evans across the world. Please say yes to SB 702.