

Isaac Gomez
March 6, 2025

Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 702

Dear Chairwoman Reynolds and Members of the Early Childhood and Behavioral Health Committee,

My name is Isaac Gomez, and I am writing in support of Senate Bill 702, which seeks to prohibit the sale and distribution of flavored tobacco products and inhalant delivery systems in Oregon. As a graduate student in epidemiology at Oregon Health & Science University and a public health professional working directly with the Latinx community, I have seen first-hand the devastating impact of tobacco use on the health of our communities.

Flavored tobacco products, particularly menthol cigarettes and fruit- or candy-flavored e-cigarettes, are a significant public health threat. Research consistently shows that these products are specifically designed to attract young people, leading to early initiation of nicotine addiction. The tobacco industry has long used these flavors to target youth and marginalized populations, including the Latinx community, worsening existing health disparities.

In my role as a community health worker, I have witnessed how flavored tobacco disproportionately affects the communities I serve. Many Latinx youth are drawn to flavored vaping products, often under the misconception that they are less harmful than traditional cigarettes. Families struggle to combat this growing issue, especially when these products are widely available in stores near schools and neighborhoods with high BIPOC populations. Additionally, menthol cigarettes have historically marketed toward Black and Latinx communities, contributing to their higher rates of tobacco-related illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

From an epidemiological perspective, the evidence is clear: flavored tobacco products are a key driver of tobacco use initiation, addiction, and long-term health conditions. Studies have shown that removing flavored tobacco products from the market can lead to significant reductions in youth initiation and increase quit attempts among current smokers. SB 702 is a critical step in reducing tobacco-related morbidity and mortality in Oregon, particularly among vulnerable populations.

As a public health advocate for underrepresented communities, I strongly support the bill's provision allowing local governments to enact stricter regulations on flavored tobacco sales. This empowers communities to take additional steps to protect their residents from the dangers of nicotine addiction.

Passing SB 702 is an urgent public health priority. I urge you to support this bill and take a stand against the tobacco industry's continued targeting of our youth and communities of color. By eliminating flavored tobacco products, we can prevent addiction before it starts and promote health equity in Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to public health, and I respectfully ask for your support in passing SB 702.

Thank you,

Isaac Gomez