

Chair Meek, Vice-Chair McLane, Members of the Committee,

My name is Daniel Shaheen Mogtaderi Moltke, and in addition to being Chief of Staff to Rep. Hartman, I also sit on the boards of several Persian and Arab cultural organizations here in Oregon and play violin with the National Arab Orchestra. However, I am writing in my personal capacity as a Middle Eastern Oregonian.

You may wonder what my Middle Eastern heritage has to do with this bill. While SB 702 might not say it outright, by restricting flavored tobacco sales to OLCC-licensed liquor stores, this bill would effectively shut down Oregon's hookah lounges because they are not allowed to sell liquor. That would be a massive cultural loss — and an insult to generations of tradition.

In typical Persian fashion, I had to include a poem in my testimony:

*"The reed becomes sugarcane in your mouth.  
It's not tobacco smoke that envelops your face—  
It's a cloud that encircles the moon."*

That was written in the 16th century by the Persian poet Ahli Shirazi, meaning that the waterpipe has been a fixture of Middle Eastern social life for at least 400 years.

Centuries before vapes, hookah was the subject of art, of metaphor, of longing. It was described in the language of love and beauty. In my written testimony, I will include paintings of people smoking hookah and hookah bases inscribed with poetry about hookah from the 1600s and 1700s. Over the centuries, it became a symbol of hospitality and community, and now commonly appears in Islamic architecture, on the balconies of Aleppo and in the cafés of Beirut.

So, when I see ads saying, "hookah isn't cultural," I have to laugh — because if hookah isn't cultural in the Middle East, then neither is baklava, calligraphy, or fighting over the check at dinner.

Yes, some conservative religious groups have tried to ban it before. They failed. No offense, but if the Ayatollahs and mullahs of the Middle East couldn't get rid of hookah, I don't think Oregon should be the place to do it.

For the record, most Middle Eastern Americans aren't even Muslim. We're also Christians, Baha'is, Jews, Zoroastrians, Druze, and yes, plenty of secular folks who just want a place to relax, sip tea, and feel connected to their roots.

I spoke with my father recently about this bill, and he reminded me that one of my grandmother's greatest joys was smoking hookah. She'd crush fresh mint leaves into the tobacco, take her time lighting the coals. She did it slowly, communally, with reverence. She passed the hose between friends and family members along with stories and love.

I want to be clear: I support efforts to keep kids from vaping. But this bill doesn't do that. It does nothing to stop the sale of vapes on the black market or flavored vapes sold online.

The lounges being targeted by this bill aren't promoting youth vaping. They are adult-only, culturally specific, community spaces. They serve tea. They host music. I've played violin in them myself. What this bill *does* is eliminate a centuries-old tradition and destroy one of the last spaces where our community can breathe together and feel connected to our ancestry.

In Toronto, a "shisha ban" forced nearly 70 businesses to close. The people who lost their jobs and gathering places were mostly Middle Eastern immigrants and second-generation Canadians. That policy was sold as a public health measure, but its real impact was displacement, isolation, and cultural erasure.

We don't have as many hookah lounges as Toronto, particularly after COVID shut so many down, but we should not repeat that mistake in Oregon. Not now, when hate crimes against Middle Eastern Americans are rising. Taking away one of the only places we feel seen and safe is not public health. It is harmful.

I urge you to do what every state that has banned flavored tobacco has done and amend SB 702 to include an exemption for hookah lounges. Merci (thank you).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. M.', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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