

Submitter: Alex Forsyth

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB702

To the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 702, which seeks to prohibit the distribution and sale of flavored inhalant delivery system products and flavored tobacco products in Oregon, except under narrow circumstances.

While protecting youth from harmful substances is a worthy goal, this bill overreaches and unfairly targets communities of color—particularly those for whom hookah (shisha) is a meaningful cultural tradition. Hookah is not a modern trend or youth-oriented fad. It is a centuries-old social practice rooted in Middle Eastern, South Asian, North African, and Mediterranean cultures. It is not religious — it is cultural—and is most often shared socially in homes or hookah lounges, not used in isolation or abuse. SB 702 ignores this context and, worse, allows the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. Some endorsers have cited that "Muslims oppose tobacco" as a justification. This line of reasoning assumes that only Muslims live in regions where hookah is used and flattens diverse cultures into one moral narrative. This assumption is not only incorrect—it is racist.

If the concern is that flavored products attract youth, then we must also scrutinize flavored alcohol, sugary products, and energy drinks—all of which are widely accessible, aggressively marketed, and far more prevalent in youth culture. Singling out hookah under the guise of youth protection while ignoring these products reveals an inconsistent and inequitable approach.

This bill threatens small immigrant-owned businesses, culturally important gathering spaces, and the right of communities to preserve their traditions. As a Muslim, a Palestinian, and a US Veteran who upholds freedom, I urge you to amend SB 702 to explicitly exempt culturally significant hookah use or vote no on this legislation entirely.

Thank you for considering this testimony.