



**RE: Support for Senate Bill 702A**

Dear Chair Meek, Vice Chair McLane, and members of the Committee:

The Oregon Council for Behavioral and its over 60 members support the passage of SB 702A. Oregon is in the midst of a behavioral health crisis and our members are on the frontline. However, we cannot treat ourselves out of this situation. We need to do more to address the problem at its sources with prevention and education. Studies have shown that nicotine changes the adolescent brain, making them more vulnerable to substance use and abuse.<sup>1</sup> SB702A is an important step in preventing future costs on our health system.

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Oregon, and nearly all tobacco use begins during youth and young adulthood. According to pediatricians, cigarette smoking can set kids up for a lifetime of nicotine addiction and serious health conditions like heart disease and lung disease.

E-cigarettes are the most popular tobacco product among Oregon teens, with over 10% of 11th graders using them in the past month.<sup>2</sup> Today, some disposable e-cigarettes can contain more nicotine than 200 cigarettes, which puts youth users at greater risk for addiction. Tobacco companies knowingly market harmful products to young users. Flavored products like cool mint, watermelon ice, and cotton candy attract and hook new young users. These tactics are working: nearly 90% of youth e-cigarette users use flavored products.<sup>3</sup>

**SB 702A Makes Important Progress in Stopping the Use of Flavored Tobacco by Young People**

SB 702A takes important steps to significantly reduce access to flavored tobacco products and ensure that they are not being sold to kids. By requiring these products to only be sold in licensed OLCC liquor stores, we will be taking important, meaningful

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<sup>1</sup> Ren, Michelle, and Shahrdad Lotfipour. "Nicotine Gateway Effects on Adolescent Substance Use." *PubMed Central*, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6754186/>. Accessed 21 May 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Health Authority, *Oregon Student Health Survey*.

<sup>3</sup> *Results from the FDA 2024 Annual National Youth Tobacco Survey*.

steps to address this public health crisis.

- There are currently 2,800+ tobacco retail license holders in Oregon and this legislation will reduce that number to 282 possible retailers - and likely less if the Oregon Supreme Court affirms the Appeals Court ruling upholding county ordinances prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products in Oregon's two-most populated counties.
- OLCC licensed liquor establishments prohibit entry to individual under 21 unless accompanied by a parent, unlike grocery and convenience stores that regularly sell a variety of other products to minors. This, along with the mandatory nature of age verification, will create stronger safeguards against underage purchases.
- It will establish regulatory authority over nicotine pouches. That will bring Zyn and like products under Oregon regulatory authority to ensure that inspectors can prevent these products from getting to kids – including the unflavored version.
- It will clarify and preserve the ability of local jurisdictions to end the sale of flavored tobacco products altogether.

### **The Legislature Should Act This Session on This Public Health Crisis**

With the declining sales of cigarettes, the tobacco industry is desperate to find ways to hook a new generation of users. We have seen this in recent years with the explosion of vaping and the more recent surge in sales of nicotine pouches. Nicotine is an extremely addictive drug and once someone is hooked it can be very difficult to stop. That path to addiction can set up young people for a lifetime of health complications. Each time this legislature fails to act, we are condemning more young Oregonians to this fate - and ourselves to the dramatic economic costs tobacco use imposes on our health care system and society. We urge you to take action now.

Senate Bill 702A is a reasonable, urgent step we should take to protect the health of Oregon kids – and that's why we urge Oregon legislators to pass it.

Thank you,

Adam Kane  
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Oregon Council for Behavioral Health