

Testimony to the Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue**re: SB 702****February 19, 2025****Crystal Weston, Environmental Health Program Director
Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Re: Oregon Environmental Council support for SB 702

Dear Chair Meek, Vice Chair McLane, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC), a non-partisan, environmental nonprofit that works at the nexus of human health and the environment, I write to express OEC's support for SB 702. Over its 57-year history, OEC has worked on multiple efforts to reduce exposures to toxic chemicals.

Flavored nicotine products are fueling a youth addiction and environmental crisis—and it's time to act. In Oregon, more than 75% of young people who use tobacco choose flavored products. These sweet, fruity, and minty flavors are designed to attract kids—disguising the dangers of nicotine behind candy-like tastes and colorful packaging. Ending the sale of flavored nicotine products is a proven, evidence-based step toward protecting our youth and curbing the e-cigarette epidemic before it gets worse.

Tobacco companies have consistently used marketing to target different communities, including the marketing of menthol cigarettes. Menthol masks the harshness of tobacco smoke—making it easier to start smoking and harder to quit. This targeted promotion has profound impacts: in Oregon, 61% of Black adults who smoke use menthol cigarettes, compared to just 17% of White adults. This stark disparity reflects results of deliberate, racially targeted tobacco industry strategies that harm communities of color.

The initial use of these products does not end with their disposal. Vaping products, especially disposables, pose a significant threat to the environment due to their plastic components and chemical contents. Discarded vapes, often littered, break down into microplastics and release chemicals like nicotine, heavy metals like lead and mercury, and even flammable lithium-ion batteries. These materials contaminate soil and water as they break down and enter the waste and stormwater systems.

The significant health risks of these products include harms from nicotine (including ADHD, depression, anxiety and adverse birth outcomes like low birth weight and higher risk of psychiatric diagnosis for developing children). When cartridges break down, microplastics enter the environment and lead to harm to reproductive, digestive, and respiratory systems, as well as increasing cancer risks.

SB 702 protects young people and communities of color and promotes a healthy environment for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Crystal Weston
Environmental Health Director
Oregon Environmental Council
crystalw@oeonline.org