

My name is Connie Ramaekers. I live in Tigard and volunteer with Parents Against Vaping, and I'm here today to strongly support SB 1571. I have worked in schools for over 40 years, serving students across multiple generations. In that time, I have seen many challenges come and go, but the growing popularity of flavored nicotine and tobacco products among youth is one of the most concerning trends of my career.

Over the past ten years, flavored tobacco products have become a significant problem for our youth. While vaping has been the primary concern in recent years, I am increasingly worried about nicotine pouches, which are gaining popularity among students because they are easy to conceal, easy to use, and often perceived as harmless.

What makes this issue especially troubling is how normalized nicotine use has become for young people. Many students genuinely believe these products are low-risk because they don't involve smoke and come in appealing flavors. Students often describe them as a way to cope with stress or peer pressure, without understanding that nicotine is highly addictive and particularly harmful to the developing brain. Over the years, I have seen nicotine dependence contribute to anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and behavioral challenges that interfere with learning.

SB 1571 is a necessary step to protect our young people. Flavors are not incidental, rather they play a key role in attracting youth and lowering the barrier to initiation. By restricting the sale of flavored nicotine pouches and setting clear rules for how these products can be sold, this bill will reduce youth access and help prevent addiction before it starts.

As someone who has spent over four decades working directly with students, I know that schools cannot solve this problem alone. When addictive, youth-appealing products are readily available, it undermines the work educators do every day to support student health and success. SB 1571 would provide meaningful support to schools, families, and communities.

I urge you to pass SB 1571 and take a clear stand for the health and future of Oregon's youth. Thank you for your time and consideration.