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SPONSOR STATEMENT

SENATE BILL 15

Prohibiting the Sale of Electronic Smoking Products to Minors

Senate Bill 15 would prohibit possession, sale, and exchange of electronic smoking devices, including their component liquid or vapor products, to individuals under 19 years of age, whether or not those products contain tobacco or nicotine.

Possession or sale of products containing tobacco or nicotine is already prohibited for individuals under 19. This bill would extend that prohibition to include electronic smoking devices and related products that may or may not include nicotine.

Within the past few years a quickly growing fad has emerged commonly known as "vaping," and typically includes an electronic smoking device used to aerosolize a chemical substance, which is then inhaled. The electronic devices themselves often resemble a traditional cigarette or stylish smoking pipe. The chemical substances aerosolized by the device are replacing traditional tobacco cigarettes and are expected to become the vice of the future. There has been an explosion of several hundreds of electronic smoking device components and chemical vapor products flooding the market to meet the demand of young consumers wanting to be "cool."

These products are often marketed as a means to reduce traditional tobacco consumption, or otherwise provide a safer alternative to the dangers of tobacco use. However, the market is so young and so quickly developing that research and evidence on long-term health impacts of vaping is as yet inconclusive. What we do know is these products usually, but not always, contain nicotine, and are offered in a wide range of concentrations and flavors. They are not regulated on many fronts, including manufacturing, marketing, and distribution. They are largely not tested for their contents, and thus the question stands as to whether these products are a health risk. It boils down to the notion that these inhalants, whatever they may be, cannot possibly be good for our bodies.

It is also intuitive that vaping, like cigarette smoking, is inherently habit-forming. By continuing to not take action against this new trend, we send the message to our youth that these products are safe and appropriate to use. There is research suggesting, and as should not be a surprise, that youth who smoke e-cigarettes eventually move on to conventional cigarettes, and/or more potent substances.

By passing SB 15, Alaska will join other states in an effort to protect our youth from forming bad habits by restricting easy access to these products in the first place.

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