



March 18, 2021

Members of the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801
Sent via email

Dear Senators Costello, Holland, Gray-Jackson, Revak and Stevens,

On behalf of the Mat-Su Health Foundation and its Board of Directors, I am writing to express support for Senate Bill 45 to align state law with federal statute by raising the minimum age for all tobacco products to 21 and to tax e-cigarette products at the same rate as other tobacco products.

Adolescents perceive e-cigarettes as safer than regular cigarettes, but it is a myth that these products are safe or that they are a cessation tool. They are the opposite—they are a grooming tool, grooming kids to accept, like, and become dependent on smoking and nicotine. Recent research indicates that adolescents and teens who try e-cigs are much more likely than other youth to progress to traditional cigarettes. In fact, a 2015 National Institutes of Health report showed that 9th graders who used e-cigs were over three times more likely to start using combustible tobacco products than those who didn't use e-cigs. Here in Alaska, in 2017, 15.7 percent of high school students used electronic vapor products when nationally the rate was 13.2 percent.

The vaping industry is protecting its business interests by pushing the belief that e-cigarettes are safer than regular cigarettes, have little health risk to the user or those exposed to second-hand emissions, and can actually help people quit smoking. There is no solid proof of these claims. One of the reports the industry has cited in the past was based on a study in England that has now come under scrutiny because it was conducted in part by researchers being paid by the vaping industry. The editors of the journal that initially published the report issued a warning alongside the article stating there was a potential conflict of interest. Yet, Public Health England refused to declare this warning when they announced the results of the flawed study to journalists. According to the renowned medical journal "The Lancet," health experts say that the major conclusion of the report was based on "an extraordinarily flimsy foundation."

Higher prices due to higher taxes are key to youth tobacco use prevention. For this reason, we support not only taxing e-cigarettes, but keeping the tax rate at 75 percent, the same as it is for other tobacco products. We also support taxing the whole device, not just the liquid or cartridge. Numerous studies in peer-reviewed journals have documented that higher prices for e-cigarettes correlate to lowered consumption, particularly among youth.

We thank you for introducing this important legislation to protect Alaska's youth from what often becomes a lifelong addiction.

Sincerely,

President and Chief Executive Officer