



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

**From:** Aaron Kusano <aaron.kusano@anchorageradiationtherapy.com>

**Sent:** Thursday, March 18, 2021 9:17 AM

**To:** Sen. Mia Costello <Sen.Mia.Costello@akleg.gov>

**Subject:** SB45

Hello Senator Costello,

I am a radiation oncologist in Anchorage, treating cancer patients from all across our state. I am writing to you about taxation of e-cigarettes (SB45).

While many think only of lung cancer when it comes to tobacco, it contributes to cancer of many sites including head and neck, esophagus, stomach, cervix, colon and bladder.

I see the dangers every day when patients are still unable to quit despite undergoing months of treatment for their tobacco induced cancers.

E-cigarette use is an epidemic particularly among youth. It creates new smokers by the false label as a "safe alternative".

There is consistent evidence that children and adolescents that use them are significantly more likely to go onto smoke traditional cigarettes.

I view this from my lense as a cancer physician, but that does not adequately represent the heart and lung effects in the population of smokers.

E-cigarettes must be taxed at the same rate as other tobacco products. They contain the same addictive nicotine and should be looked at the same way that cigarettes are.

A bullet takes a firearm to be harmful. We should not fall into a semantic/technical trap by treating components of e-cigarette delivery systems differently. The entire e-cigarette device should be taxed.

Strong e-cigarette taxation is necessary to fulfill it's public health goals and protect current and future Alaskans. I ask that you support such efforts.

Thank you for your time,

Sincerely,

Aaron Kusano

**From:** Andrea Thomas <andrea61thomas@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Thursday, March 18, 2021 7:57 AM

**To:** Sen. Mia Costello <Sen.Mia.Costello@akleg.gov>

**Subject:** SB 45

I live in Sitka, Ak and I'm writing to you about SB45 taxing e-cigarettes. As a recent retiree I have witnessed the decline in youth use of tobacco only to see a new rise in e-cigarettes. Tobacco companies work hard to keep a new supply of users. It is our responsibility to protect our youth.

E-cigarettes should be taxed at the same rate as other tobacco products. Also, the entire product should be taxed, not just a small piece of it. Taxes are our best policy approach to protect youth from tobacco addiction.

Please support a strong e-cigarette tax to keep our young people safe and healthy.

Best,  
Andrea Thomas

Sent from my iPhone Sent from my iPhone

**From:** Johna Beech <mizbeech@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Thursday, March 18, 2021 8:13 PM

**To:** Sen. Mia Costello <Sen.Mia.Costello@akleg.gov>; Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson <Sen.Elvi.Gray-Jackson@akleg.gov>; Sen. Roger Holland <Senator.Roger.Holland@akleg.gov>; Sen. Joshua Revak <Sen.Joshua.Revak@akleg.gov>; Sen. Gary Stevens <Sen.Gary.Stevens@akleg.gov>

**Subject:** SB45 Testimony

Hello Senate Labor & Commerce Committee members,

My name is Johna Beech and I am a resident in Kenai.

First off, thank you for scheduling another hearing on SB45. I am in full support of SB45.

The FDA acknowledges e-cigarettes as tobacco products. They should be taxed at the same rate as traditional tobacco products. At this time, in the state of Alaska, E-cigarettes are not taxed at all. Also, the entire product should be taxed, not just a portion of it.

We have done so well in our advancement in our fight against cancer; with early detection and prevention being two major players in reducing death rates. Our youth know that traditional tobacco is a bad deal. Yet we see an increase in youth use of e-cigarettes. If we can prevent our youth from using e-cigarettes by taxing the tobacco product, why wouldn't we do so?

Please support a strong e-cigarette tax to keep our young people safe and healthy..

Thank you,

Johna Beech



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Sincerely,

President and Chief Executive Officer

## Tim Lamkin

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**From:** Sen. Gary Stevens  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 18, 2021 7:47 PM  
**To:** kristen mcdonald  
**Cc:** Tim Lamkin  
**Subject:** Re: E-cigarettes

Thank you so much Kristen for your comments and personal story.  
Warm regards,  
Gary

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 18, 2021, at 5:27 PM, kristen mcdonald <tokristenmcdonald@hotmail.com> wrote:

Greetings Senator Stevens,

Thank you so much for you support!

I'm writing this out of concern regarding the e-cigarette bill regarding coming to the floor this Friday which discusses the tax of e-cigarettes.

This is close to my heart having lost family members to smoking and supporting too many cancer patients in my nursing career of over 30 years.

Future generations are successfully being targeted by e-cigarette companies. In high school my daughter in honor society was a part of tobacco prevention. She took a position as an underage buyer. Now in college she thought nothing of vape pens which all the kids used and could be easily taken anywhere. She developed a harsh cough and decreased her level of activity due to breathing issues a year later. I'm grateful she has quit vaping and fully recovered. Some youth aren't as fortunate.

Please dissuade our youth by taxing e-cigs and paraphernalia used for e-cig consumption in the same manner cigarettes have been taxed and declined in use and sales as a result.

With Gratitude,  
Kristen McDonald

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