



PREVENTING TOBACCO ADDICTION FOUNDATION

TOBACCO
~~eighteen~~
twenty-one

Alaska Senate Finance Committee
Testimony in Support of SB 24
April 1, 2025

Chairmen Hoffman, Olson, Stedman, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rob Crane. I am a family doctor and retired professor of Family Medicine at Ohio State, as well as the president of Tobacco 21. Thank you for the opportunity to express our strong support for Senate Bill 24.

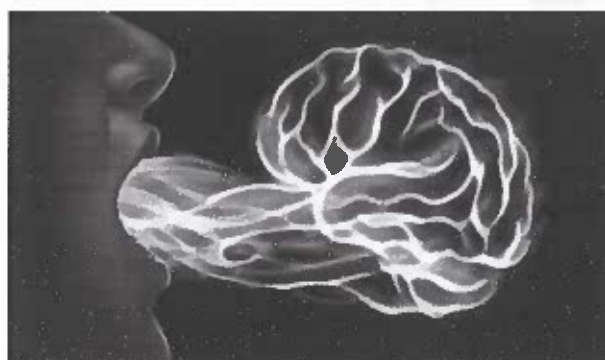
As we understand the bill, it addresses three key points:

1. Raising the sales age for all nicotine products to 21
2. Preserving critical funding for the Tobacco Prevention & Control Fund
3. Implementing a user fee on e-cigarette (vaping) products

While we support all three measures as vital protections for teens, I will focus on the age restriction.

At 75 years old, I have spent nearly three decades working on Tobacco 21. It has been an uphill battle against an industry with enormous financial power, but significant progress has been made. Over 500 cities—including Sitka (2018) and Anchorage (2019)—and 43 states have adopted Tobacco 21 policies. In December 2019, President Trump strongly supported and signed a bipartisan federal law raising the age to 21.

My main message today is about addiction. To understand nicotine addiction—arguably the most powerful and deadliest addiction in the world—you must understand dopamine, the most powerful neurotransmitter in the brain. A single drag from a cigarette or a vape delivers nicotine into the bloodstream almost instantly, faster than an IV. This triggers an intense release of dopamine, the brain's "feel-good" chemical.



Dopamine is great! It improves focus, lessens anxiety, reduces appetite and increases energy. Naturally, it is released through positive experiences such as friendship, exercise, sunlight, food, sex and human connection. However, when artificially flooded with nicotine, the brain adapts by lowering its natural dopamine response. Over time, the user loses the ability to derive pleasure from ordinary experiences—only nicotine can restore dopamine levels, but only for a short time before another hit is needed.

For young people, the consequences are even more severe. Early nicotine use physically rewires the brain, creating a shortcut between the limbic system (emotions) and the prefrontal cortex

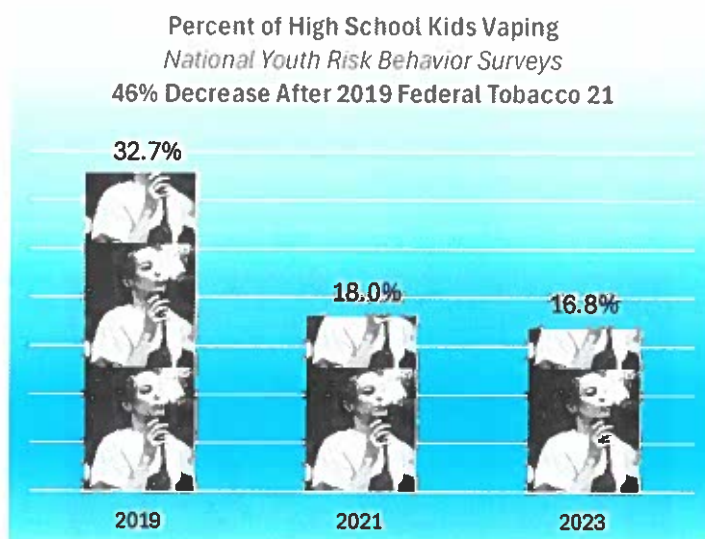
(decision-making). This rewiring intensifies cravings and exacerbates dopamine crashes, increasing the risk of severe depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and behavioral issues in schools and homes.



Alaska has a serious problem: 30% of high school seniors in the state are smoking, dipping,

or vaping. That's an off-the-charts ridiculous number. A lower-48, drug pushing industry has successfully targeted your kids in vast numbers, and policymakers have struggled to find effective countermeasures.

Tobacco 21 is already in place for 40% of Alaska's population (Sitka and Anchorage), and federal FDA inspectors are enforcing the 21 age restriction statewide. Moreover, the 2019 law threatens partial loss of federal substance abuse resources if states don't effectively enforce at 21. This leaves legitimate, community-minded retailers stuck in a confusing and uneven regulatory landscape.



Does Tobacco 21 work? The evidence is clear. Numerous studies show its effectiveness, but one of the most compelling statistics is this: two years after President Trump signed the federal Tobacco 21 law, teen vaping in the U.S. declined by 46%. Alaska has yet to see these benefits—but it's not too late.

Your kids deserve a common-sense, realistic, budget-neutral, and effective solution. Their brain development, their future health, and the financial well-being of Alaska depend on it.

Thank you for your time and kind attention. I welcome any questions you may have.

Rob Crane, MD -- President
Preventing Tobacco Addiction Foundation / Tobacco 21
Rob.Crane@Tobacco21.org
Mobile: 614-296-6666