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Senator Gary Stevens

SPONSOR STATEMENT

SENATE BILL 89

Increasing the Minimal Age for Tobacco and E-Cigarettes: "T-21"

Senate Bill 89 proposes two key policies: 1) to align state law with federal law in raising the minimum age to buy, sell or possess tobacco and electronic smoking products (ESP's) from age 19 to 21; and 2) to establish a sales tax for ESP's.

In December 2019, Congress passed and the President signed into law a provision raising the age of sale for all tobacco, nicotine and ESP products to age 21 nationally *with no exceptions*.

Preventing illegal vendor sales is a critical part of the overall effort to prevent and reduce youth smoking. Alaska has an active underage sales enforcement program which has been effective in reducing sales of smoking products to minors. Updating Alaska statutes from 19 to 21 to mirror the federal minimum age of sale of these products will allow our state enforcement program to be effective.

The latest "[Tobacco Facts 2022 Update](#)" issued by the Alaska Dept. of Health, Division of Public Health shows an increasing trend among young Alaskans in high school, indicating 26% of the statewide population as active users of ESPs in 2019 alone, and 46% of students having "tried" ESPs. Those statewide figures, along with national ones, are projected to have grown substantially since then.

Despite claims that e-cigarettes help adults quit smoking, or offer adults a "safe" alternative to smoking tobacco, ESPs are under-regulated and have not been found by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be effective in helping smokers actually quit, let alone to be legitimately "safe." Nearly all e-cigarettes contain some amount of nicotine, and some contain as much or more nicotine as a pack of cigarettes. It is not yet known with any certainty what other compounds these vapor products are delivering into users' airways, let alone the long-term effect these products have on human health.

Meanwhile, taxes have been proven to reduce youth tobacco use, resulting in fewer kids becoming life-long smokers, and thus ultimately reducing healthcare costs. In addition to deterring kids from beginning to use these products, taxes help adults who actually want to quit, do so.

Thank you for your consideration of this important piece of legislation.

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