

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 3, 2025

1:32 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair  
Senator Kelly Merrick, Vice Chair  
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson  
Senator Forrest Dunbar  
Senator Robert Yundt

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE BILL NO. 24

"An Act relating to tobacco, tobacco products, electronic smoking products, nicotine, and products containing nicotine; raising the minimum age to purchase, exchange, or possess tobacco, a product containing nicotine, or an electronic smoking product; relating to the tobacco use education and cessation fund; relating to the taxation of electronic smoking products and vapor products; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 50

"An Act relating to the comprehensive plans of first and second class boroughs."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SB 24

SHORT TITLE: TOBACCO/NICOTINE/E-CIG AGE; E-CIG TAX

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS

01/10/25	(S)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/10/25
01/22/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/25	(S)	L&C, FIN
02/24/25	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

02/24/25 (S) Heard & Held  
02/24/25 (S) MINUTE(L&C)  
03/03/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 50

SHORT TITLE: MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS: HOUSING

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) DUNBAR

01/17/25 (S) PREFILE RELEASED 1/17/25  
01/22/25 (S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/22/25 (S) CRA, L&C  
02/04/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
02/04/25 (S) Heard & Held  
02/04/25 (S) MINUTE(CRA)  
02/11/25 (S) CRA AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)  
02/11/25 (S) Moved CSSB 50(CRA) Out of Committee  
02/11/25 (S) MINUTE(CRA)  
02/12/25 (S) CRA RPT CS 2NR 2DP SAME TITLE  
02/12/25 (S) NR: MERRICK, YUNDT  
02/12/25 (S) DP: DUNBAR, GRAY-JACKSON  
03/03/25 (S) L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

**WITNESS REGISTER**

TIM LAMKIN, Staff  
Senator Gary Stevens  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided a summary for SB 24.

ROEY ARMSTRONG, Co-president  
Youth Encouraging Alaskan's Health (YEAH)  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 24.

BRAD BOEDECKER, Owner  
Eagle River Chevron  
Eagle River, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 24.

JEN GRIFFIS, Vice President  
Policy and Advocacy  
Alaska Children's Trust  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 24.

TABITHA KARPOW, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 24.

CARRIE NYSSSEN, Senior Director

Advocacy

American Lung Association

Vancouver, Washington

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 24.

VALERIA DELGAD, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 24.

ALEX MCDONALD, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to SB 24.

AARON OSTEREACK, representing self

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 24.

JULIE CLEATON, Secretary

Board of Directors

Alaska Public Health Association

Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of SB 24.

HAHLEN BEHNKEN, Staff

Senator Forrest Dunbar

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided the sectional analysis for SB 50.

CHRISTOPHER CONSTANT, Chair

Anchorage Assembly

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified by invitation on SB 50.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[1:32:35 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN called the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Merrick, Gray-Jackson, Dunbar, Yundt and Chair Bjorkman.

#### **SB 24-TOBACCO/NICOTINE/E-CIG AGE; E-CIG TAX**

[1:33:34 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 24 "An Act relating to tobacco, tobacco products, electronic smoking products, nicotine, and products containing nicotine; raising the minimum age to purchase, exchange, or possess tobacco, a product containing nicotine, or an electronic smoking product; relating to the tobacco use education and cessation fund; relating to the taxation of electronic smoking products and vapor products; and providing for an effective date."

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TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided a summary of SB 24 and stated that SB 24 raises the minimum age for purchasing, possessing, and selling tobacco and nicotine products from 19 to 21 and would implement a 25 percent sales tax on cigarettes and vaping products at the point of sale.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN announced invited testimony on SB 24.

[1:35:34 PM](#)

ROEY ARMSTRONG, Co-president, Youth Encouraging Alaskan's Health (YEAH), Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 24 and stated that YEAH is a youth-led group focused on preventing nicotine and tobacco use among Alaskan teens, especially in rural communities. YEAH staff learn about the harms of these substances and share that knowledge through school visits, videos, and an annual youth-led summit. She said at the summit, YEAH staff train teens to educate their own communities. She said she joined YEAH after attending a virtual summit, inspired by her dad's struggle with quitting tobacco. She said YEAH has been active for five years and believes education is the strongest tool to prevent addiction. She stated that taxes on tobacco would help fund programs like YEAH and discourage youth use by raising prices—something that affects young people more because young people have limited income. She said higher prices might stop those who aren't addicted yet but are considering trying it socially. Once addicted, people will find ways to access these substances, which is why early prevention is key. She stated that by adding this tax, YEAH aims to break the cycle—using funds from nicotine and tobacco sales to educate youth and prevent future use. In high school, she saw e-cigarettes in nearly every classroom. She attended a Title I school where many students lived at or below the poverty line and were getting addicted because these products were both

accessible and normalized. She stated that raising the legal age to 21 would help prevent sales to minors. This change would make enforcement easier and help curb youth addiction before it grows.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN opened public testimony on SB 24.

[1:42:54 PM](#)

At ease.

[1:43:29 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting.

[1:43:38 PM](#)

At ease.

[1:44:04 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting.

[1:44:41 PM](#)

BRAD BOEDECKER, Owner, Eagle River Chevron, Eagle River, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 24 because of its unintended harm to businesses like his. He stated that if someone was to look at his store's vapor section, people would see he follows federal regulations and offers legal products responsibly. The nicotine cap in SB 24 would eliminate about 75 percent of his vapor inventory, even though it's federally legal, hurting his ability to meet customer needs and pushing people toward unsafe black-market products. He stated that the added tax structure would also make remaining products less competitive, while unregulated products with higher nicotine content stay cheaper.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN asked if he had a suggestion regarding the cap on nicotine.

[1:47:15 PM](#)

MR. BOEDECKER answered that he doesn't have a suggestion and that whatever products he's been using seem to be federally regulated.

[1:47:41 PM](#)

JEN GRIFFIS, Vice President, Policy and Advocacy, Alaska Children's Trust, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 24 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 24 which addresses the minimum purchase age and consistent taxing of tobacco products, including vaping products. Alaska Children's Trust believes in a future where Alaska's children, youth and families have the knowledge, skills, supports, and resources they need to thrive.

To help achieve this vision, we support policies that promote the health and wellbeing of Alaska's children and youth.

Senate Bill 24 supports the reduction in underage tobacco usage by aligning state law with federal statute, raising the minimum purchase age for all tobacco products from 19 to 21.

Additionally SB24 establishes a sales tax for e-cigarette products, also commonly known as vapes, making the tax on vaping products consistent with taxes on other tobacco products in the state.

Tax policies and age restrictions on purchases are policies associated with a reduction in the underage use of tobacco products.

According to KIDS COUNT 2024, 17 percent of Alaska high school students reported having used a vape in the past month. In 2022, vapes were the most used nicotine product by youth.

Limiting access to youth through targeted taxation is a policy choice that is currently implemented in Alaska for other substances, including cigarettes and alcohol. Both cigarette smoking and use of alcohol have consistently declined since the introduction of taxes on these specific items. Alaska's last peak in underage alcohol use was in 2017.

Additionally research in other states has demonstrated that increased prices on e-cigarette products through taxes has resulted in a lower rate of use among youth.

The policy changes in Senate Bill 24 would promote safe behaviors in Alaska's youth, increasing youth health and wellbeing.

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TABITHA KARPOW, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 24 and stated that as a lifelong Alaskan, she's deeply concerned about how easy it is for kids to access tobacco and e-cigarettes. She said one of her children was given a vape at school and got in trouble. While the school partners with a prevention program, nothing is available on-site, so he was suspended. She said a nonprofit program helped him return five days early after completing a class. She fully supports a tax that funds prevention programs directly, so schools can offer support in-house and help kids stay in school. She said e-cigarettes are currently untaxed because e-cigarettes emerged after the 2004 cigarette tax.

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CARRIE NYSSSEN, Senior Director, Advocacy, American Lung Association, Vancouver, Washington, testified in support of SB 24 and stated that in 2018, the U.S. Surgeon General declared youth vaping an epidemic, which continues today. SB 24 helps address this by taxing e-cigarettes and funding prevention programs. She said these are not cessation products and no manufacture has sought to have the products approved as quit programs. The products contain harmful substances like lead and ultrafine particles. Flavored vapes, sound safe but pose serious risks when inhaled. She said raising the purchase age to 21 and supporting education are essential steps to protect youth health.

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VALERIA DELGAD-LOPEZ, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 24 and stated that vaping has reached elementary schools giving an example of a school in Anchorage where fourth and fifth grade students were caught trading chocolate milk for e-cigarette puffs. Middle and high school students continue to vape, often in bathrooms, fueling early addiction due to high nicotine levels. She said one young adult shared she started using nicotine as a teen, not knowing nicotine was addictive, and now struggles to quit. Parents often can't detect e-cigarette use because the devices are easy to hide. She stated that studies have shown that for every 10 percent increase in the price of tobacco products, the smoking rate drops about 4 percent amongst adults and 7 percent among youth, which is significant. She said that raising the purchase age to 21 and increasing taxes are proven strategies to reduce youth vaping and support prevention.

[1:56:28 PM](#)

ALEX MCDONALD, representing self, Fairbanks, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 24 and stated that vaping is not smoking—there’s no combustion or smoke, which is why many former smokers like him made the switch. He said he lost his grandmother to cancer from smoking and didn’t want the same fate. Even the FDA recommends switching to safer products like e-cigarettes, and youth vaping rates in Alaska are now at record lows. He said taxing safer alternatives is counterproductive and will possibly push people back to smoking. This proposed sales tax would even apply to existing local wholesale taxes, creating a double tax burden that unfairly penalizes people trying to quit smoking.

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AARON OSTEREACK, representing self, Anchorage, Alaska, testified in support of SB 24 and stated that he’s not saying e-cigarettes don’t affect youth, but he believes the impact may be greater than the previous testifier suggested. He said in the Anchorage School District, vaping is the second leading cause of suspensions. Youth of all ages are getting access, and early use often leads to long-term nicotine addiction. He said as a parent of three, he has seen this firsthand with his oldest who avoided substances until recently but was influenced by peers and is now trying to quit vaping. He said education and support programs are essential, so youth understand the risks and make informed choices. Schools across Alaska need resources to address addiction early and help prevent health and academic consequences.

[2:02:50 PM](#)

JULIE CLEATON, Secretary, Board of Directors, Alaska Public Health Association, Wasilla, Alaska, testified in support of SB 24 and stated that her organization supports efforts to reduce tobacco use, a leading cause of preventable death in Alaska, responsible for around 600 deaths annually and costing the state hundreds of millions in healthcare and lost productivity. She said in January, the Alaska Public Health Association passed a resolution urging the state to prioritize six proven policy actions:

- Increase funding for tobacco prevention and education.
- Raise taxes on all tobacco and nicotine products, including e-cigarettes.
- Strengthen clean indoor air laws.
- Ban flavored tobacco products.
- Raise the legal purchase age to 21.
- Remove penalties for youth possession and use.

[2:04:36 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN closed public testimony on SB 24.

[2:05:02 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN held SB 24 in committee.

[2:05:06 PM](#)

At ease.

**SB 50-MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS: HOUSING**

[CSSB 50(CRA) was before the committee.]

[2:08:07 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 50 "An Act relating to the comprehensive plans of first and second class boroughs."

[2:08:33 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR speaking as sponsor, provided a brief summary for SB 50 and stated that SB 50 makes a small but meaningful change to Alaska's local government planning laws by adding "a housing plan" to the list of elements in comprehensive plans under Title 29. He stated that initially, his office thought comprehensive plans were required by state law, but the statute uses "may," not "shall," so this is more a recommendation than a mandate, still it's symbolically important. SB 50 is supported by groups like Housing Alaskans Public Partnership, UAA's Center for Economic Development, and Assembly Member Anna Brawley, a planner who helped develop SB 50. He said this effort stems from Alaska's housing crisis that lacks sufficient attainable housing at nearly all income levels. SB 50 is part of a broader push to encourage housing development statewide.

[2:10:20 PM](#)

HAHLEN BEHNKEN, Staff, Senator Forrest Dunbar, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, provided the sectional analysis for SB 50 as follows:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SECTIONAL ANALYSIS**

*SB 50: MUNICIPAL COMPREHENSIVE PLANS: HOUSING*

Section 1: AS 29.40.030(a): Adds a new subsection 5 to AS 29.40.030(a) stating that a housing plan will now be one of the components that may be included in a comprehensive plan. Redesignates the former subsection 5 as subsection 6.

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SENATOR DUNBAR stated that his office spoke with Director Mueller and her team over the summer, and while the division plans a full Title 29 rewrite in the coming years, that's a long-term effort. Her office had no objection to his office moving forward with this smaller change in the meantime. SB 50 doesn't require local governments to revise current comprehensive plans or incur new costs. Instead, as cities update their plans—typically every 10 years—they'll add a housing plan going forward. He stated that he understands comprehensive planning is a heavy lift for local governments, which is why this approach is gradual and practical.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN announced invited testimony on SB 50.

[2:12:34 PM](#)

CHRISTOPHER CONSTANT, Chair, Anchorage Assembly, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 50 and stated that housing is a crisis affecting homelessness, youth leaving the state, and seniors seeking suitable homes. He said Senator Sullivan once hosted a discussion with HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge and housing developers highlighting the severe shortage of new homes and the barriers to building them. Problems can't be solved without a plan, and SB 50's "may" language encourages communities to include housing plans without mandating them. He said Anchorage isn't subject to this, but solutions must work statewide, including rural areas, since people move across communities. Encouraging thoughtful housing planning improves the chances of addressing this persistent challenge effectively.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN held SB 50 in committee.

[2:15:42 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting at 2:15 p.m.