

## Lou Mansolillo

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**From:** Simone Punchak <simone@punchak.net>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 25, 2025 11:22 AM  
**To:** Yugerny Gomez; House Corporations Committee  
**Subject:** Student Written Testimony for the Act Relating to Taxation- Cigarette and other Tobacco Products Tax, LC00148

Dear Representative O'Brien,

My name is Simone Punchak and I am a constituent who lives in Providence County. I am a high school senior, who is an active member of my community's prevention initiatives. As a result, I have seen firsthand how access to vapes has influenced my peers, including one of my best friends. I

I am writing today to express my refusal for the Act Relating to Taxation– Cigarette and other Tobacco Products Tax, LC00148.

The bill allows for the sale of "flavored" nicotine products in vape shops by exempting them from the prohibition of selling electronic nicotine-delivery system products that is currently upheld by the state. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), users of flavored e-cigarettes reported greater self-perceived addiction than users of non-flavored e-cigarettes due to the flavoring appearing to young adults and providing greater satisfaction. As a result, by introducing the sale of flavored nicotine products into vape shops, the state is actively supporting the widespread use of these products amongst adolescents.

The legal age to purchase one of these products in the State of Rhode Island is 21 years. However, from observing the stalls of my school bathroom to discussing with peers, that limit poses little obstacle to a minor's ability to get their hands on these products. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) claims that in 2024, 5.9% of youth were currently using nicotine products. Of this percentage, 26.3% of the recorded users reported using e-cigarette products daily and nearly 40% of users remain at risk for a high nicotine addiction.

Many of the reasons why one adolescents (minors/youth) fall into using nicotine products is due to peer pressure; however, there is the stress relieving factor that is awfully tempting. I observed this with one of my best friends. After he endured a rough breakup and summer seemed to not cut him any slack, he started to vape as a way to cope with his depression. He would get bored, look for something to help him feel relaxed, and thus turn to one of these products. He boasts that he is "not addicted to nicotine" as a result; however, he hides his products and cannot go a week without it. Even then, he boasts of the good flavors and how being a user is able to go more unnoticeable when compared to other stimulant products. When his use began, he was 17 years old- under the legal age to purchase one of these products. He is currently 18 years old.

The audience of these specific nicotine products- the ones with the flavorings- are the individuals who are at the most risk of addiction. I have observed that the youth are most attracted to the flavored products. By introducing these products into vape shops, it is only supporting the notion that an adolescent should use this product by marketing it in a more appealing way. I believe that the passing of this act will do more harm than good. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

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