

House Bill 5329 – Support- Yes

House Corporations Committee:

Good Afternoon Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lisa Ciarlone, owner of Vaporetti, a vapor specialty store in Rumford. For 14 years, I've proudly helped countless adult smokers switch to vaping—and I'm here today because vaping saved me from a 27-year smoking habit.

I'm recovering a medical emergency that hospitalized me two weeks ago and unfortunately I am still recovering and unable to attend today's hearing.

My testimony is for the 60,664 adult Rhode Island voters like me who vape, and for the small businesses who pay taxes and keep our state's economy strong.

I would like to thank Representative O'Brien for sponsoring this important legislation. I would like to extend my gratitude to Representative Casey, Solomon and the other co-sponsors for your support. Your leadership in promoting harm reduction, supporting small businesses, and upholding adults' right to make their own choices is truly appreciated.

Economic Benefits and Local Business Growth

This bill isn't just about access to harm reduction—it's about jobs, tax revenue, and keeping revenue here in the state. Small businesses like mine employ local workers, pay taxes, and drive economic activity..

It provides a path forward that supports long standing small business, employees, and Rhode Island's economy, ensuring a steady stream of tax revenue stays in-state.

Harm Reduction and Public Health

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Over 20 years ago I had a serious reaction from medication prescribed to help me quit smoking, leaving me with a life long condition from the side effects. While other methods simply did not work.

Vaping was the only solution that worked for me, and it's why started my business and advocate for vaping as a harm reduction tool. Traditional quit methods failed me; vaping succeeded. My story is not uncommon.

The CDC's 2023 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey proves vaping's impact:

Rhode Island's adult smoking rate dropped 19.5% from 2022 to 2023, leaving just about 85,000 smokers and 20,041 fewer smokers than the previous year.

Young adult smoking, among those aged 18 to 24, has decreased by 75% since 2016.

Meanwhile, vaping has grown: 60,664 Rhode Island adults—6.8% of our population—now use e-cigarettes as of 2023 an alternative to smoking deadly cigarettes and reported over 20,000 less adult smokers!

Together, these numbers show vaping is an adult exit strategy from smoking, not a gateway to tobacco. [Source: CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2023 – <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/index.html>]

HB 5329 supports the 60,664 vapers driving this progress, saving millions in healthcare costs while strengthening our economy.

House Bill 5329 ensures these adults can access legal, regulated products, keeping businesses like mine viable and preventing consumers from turning to dangerous black markets or out-of-state purchases. Long standing Vapor specialty stores are trusted sources in the Rhode Island community that offer education, battery safety and guidance to help people move away from deadly cigarettes.

The Consequences of Overregulation

Restrictive policies don't protect public health, it creates a dangerous black market, harms small businesses and drive revenue out of state.

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This bill prevents this by giving adults access in age-restricted stores, ensuring Rhode Island's economy grows while public health improves. Prohibition doesn't work; it punishes law-abiding shops like mine while benefiting criminals.

House Bill 5329 isn't just about vaping—it's about respecting adults' rights, keeping small businesses open, and ensuring Rhode Island thrives. The data is clear: vaping is overwhelmingly an adult choice, smoking rates are plummeting, and a giving adults legal access benefits both public health and our state's finances.

As we have learned from the past, prohibition does not work. It only punishes small businesses while allowing the black market to thrive. When legal options are restricted, consumers are forced to turn to unregulated and potentially dangerous sources. This benefits criminals rather than law-abiding businesses.

I urge the committee to pass House Bill 5329 to protect the 60,664 adult Rhode Island voters who vape as an alternative to smoking, keeping their choices—and our economy—right here in Rhode Island.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to reach out for an questions.

Respectfully,

Lisa Ciarlone

Vaporette – Rumford, RI

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