



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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## Testimony Re: H-7225 Article 6 – Electronic Cigarettes Systems and Taxation

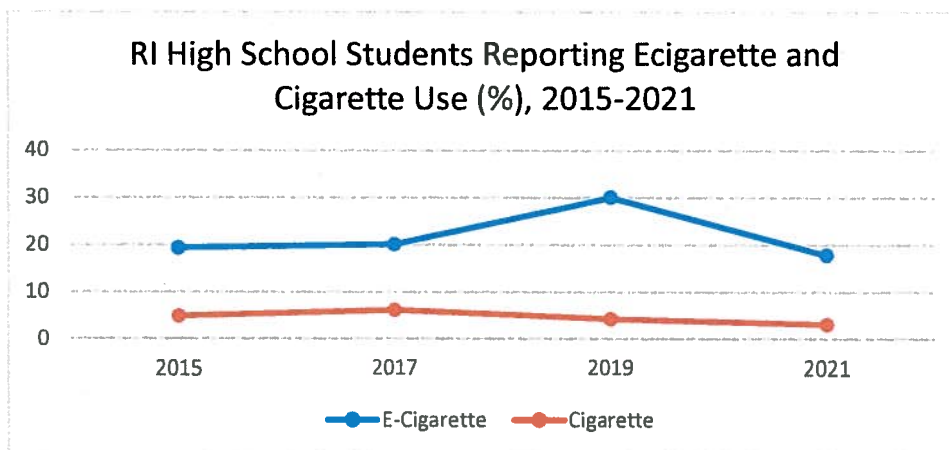
House Finance Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for the tobacco control, enforcement, and prevention proposals in the Governor’s budget in Article 6 sections 3,6,16-20. These proposals would 1) transfer Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) licensing from the Department of Health to the Division of Taxation to centralize all tobacco product licensing at the Division of Taxation; 2) codify in state law existing regulations that prohibit the sale of flavored ENDS, and 3) impose a tax on electronic cigarettes/Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) at a rate of 80% of the wholesale cost.

### Need to Support Continued Tobacco Prevention Efforts for Youth and Young Adults in Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2015-2021.

Since 2019, when 30% of high school students reported electronic cigarette use, there has been a decrease in use with 18% reporting use in 2021. At the end of 2019, Rhode Island raised the minimum age for the sale of tobacco and nicotine products from 18 to 21. Policies like this are likely to contribute to the reduction of e-cigarette use among youth. It is important to keep moving in the right direction and ensure that additional policies support and enhance the prevention and enforcement efforts that have positively impacted youth health.

**Importance of Tax Parity for Youth**

Increasing the price of tobacco leads to lower tobacco use, especially among youth and young adults. As states consider tobacco tax increases, it is important to achieve tax parity for all tobacco products. Unless tax rates are consistent across tobacco products the lower cost products become alternatives which people can switch to rather than stopping using tobacco products altogether. If the tobacco tax is not raised enough, youth could switch over to combustible cigarettes. We ask the committee to consider a \$1.00 increase in the cigarette tax to achieve tax parity.

**Codify Flavored ENDS Existing Regulations**

This is an important step that will finally ensure adequate enforcement of the longstanding ENDS regulations. It also serves as a reminder that our work in this area is not done. Menthol cigarettes and other flavored tobacco products (such as little cigars) remain on the market. These products are heavily marketed and targeted at communities of color, youth, and LGBTQ+ communities, and their continued sale perpetuates health equity gaps. We look forward to working with the General Assembly on a comprehensive approach to flavored tobacco products.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown on tobacco control and prevention for youth. It has been a priority in Rhode Island for decades, and we have made much progress to reduce youth tobacco use, although a significant amount of work still lies ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.