



**Testimony Re: H-8346**  
**House Health and Human Services Committee**  
**March 30, 2026**  
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 8346.** This bill would require the Department of Health to implement a tobacco control program that incorporates evidence-based best practices for tobacco prevention and cessation to prevent tobacco-related disease and diminish tobacco use in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island has made progress in reducing youth tobacco use. Cigarette use among U.S. middle and high school students continues to reach record lows. [In 2024, 2.8% of Rhode Island high school students](#) and 1% of high school students nationally reported currently smoking cigarettes.

Despite this progress, tobacco use continues to be [the leading preventable cause](#) of death and disease in both Rhode Island and the United States. [In 2023](#), approximately 12% of Rhode Island high school students reported having ever tried cigarettes. An estimated 1,100 youth in Rhode Island will try smoking cigarettes for the first time this year, and nearly 90% of adults who currently smoke cigarettes report starting to use tobacco or nicotine products by age 18.

Tobacco use among youth, including e-cigarettes (electronic nicotine delivery systems or ENDS), is an epidemic, according to the [US Surgeon General](#). Flavored e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches are the most used tobacco/nicotine products among youth and young adults. It is vital that tobacco prevention and cessation programs for youth continue to adapt to the changing landscape of tobacco use.

**More than 1 in 10 middle schoolers and 3 in 10 high schoolers in our state have ever used e-cigarettes, and almost [7% of middle schoolers reported currently using e-cigarettes.](#)** However, like many health promotion initiatives, tobacco control programs face a tenuous federal funding landscape. Tobacco use among children and youth is an issue that will only continue to grow as prevention efforts are hampered by federal funding cuts, unless Rhode Island prioritizes evidence-based policies and programs to stop youth tobacco use.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown on prioritizing [tobacco control](#) in the past, through tax policy, raising the minimum age, and enacting restrictions to prohibit sales of flavored ENDS. **We strongly urge you to pass House Bill 8346 to ensure that this work continues and we work to end youth tobacco use.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.