

OPPOSE S2098

To the Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Lisa Ciarlone, co-owner of Vaporetti, a vapor specialty store located in East Providence, Rhode Island. Vaporetti has operated in Rhode Island for over 15 years, and for more than a decade we have advocated for tobacco harm reduction for adult smokers. I am also a board member of THR 101 and the Rhode Island Smoke-Free Trade Association. I respectfully ask the committee to oppose this legislation.

First and foremost, no minor should be using nicotine products or any other adult age restricted product. Any retailer knowingly selling to minors should absolutely be held accountable and punished. Responsible vapor specialty stores have always supported strict age verification, compliance checks, and enforcement against bad actors. In fact, shops like ours advocated for age restrictions on vapor products before they were even codified into law.

According to the most recent CDC and FDA data, youth vaping has declined to historically low levels, with daily youth vaping now approximately 1.4% nationally. Prevention, education, and enforcement are working.

I would remind the committee that cigarettes — which are not part of this legislation — remain the deadliest consumer product ever sold on the planet. Smoking kills more than 8 million people globally every year and over 480,000 Americans annually. Cigarettes have taken more lives than all wars combined, more than HIV, more than alcohol, and more than illegal drugs, yet combustible cigarettes remain widely available everywhere.

There are currently no flavor restrictions on marijuana products or alcohol products, both of which are sold in countless flavors. Yet we continue targeting the one category many adult smokers have used as an alternative to combustible cigarettes.

As Rhode Island has already seen with the state flavor ban, adults who want these products are still obtaining them. These policies do not eliminate demand. Instead, they push sales online, across state lines, and into unregulated markets while hurting

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responsible local businesses that comply with state law. Rhode Island also continues losing tax revenue to neighboring states as adults simply cross the border to purchase these products elsewhere.

Research has also raised concerns regarding unintended consequences. Peer reviewed studies have found that flavor restrictions were associated with increases in cigarette sales in some areas, raising concerns that restricting reduced harm alternatives may unintentionally drive some adults back toward combustible cigarettes.

<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/734689>

For many adults, including many of my customers, moving away from the taste and smell of burning tobacco was life changing. These products provided a pathway away from combustible cigarettes for countless adults.

I respectfully urge the committee to reject policies that restrict reduced harm alternatives for adults while combustible cigarettes remain widely accessible throughout our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Lisa Ciarlone