

Jamie Plume

From: Lindsey Stroud <lindsey@thr101.org>
Sent: Friday, March 20, 2026 9:26 PM
To: Senate Finance
Subject: Legislative Overview: SB 2844 and Vape Retail Reform

You don't often get email from lindsey@thr101.org. Learn why this is important

Can't see this message? [View in browser](#)

A New Path for Harm Reduction: Rhode Island Considers Vape Shop Model

 

Dear Members of the Rhode Island Senate Finance Committee:

Tobacco Harm Reduction, Inc. ([THR101](#)) is a Florida-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting public health through science-based education, research, and advocacy. Our mission is to reduce the devastating health impacts of combustible tobacco by advancing awareness and understanding of tobacco harm reduction (THR) strategies.

We are writing to share THR101's latest *Analysis & Commentary* regarding Senate Bill 2844 (SB 2844), legislation that would modify Rhode Island's flavored e-cigarette restrictions by allowing flavored vapor products to be sold in licensed, adult-only specialty vape shops.

This proposal represents a shift from broad prohibition toward a regulated retail model designed to balance youth protections with adult access to reduced-risk alternatives.

Key Findings:

- **Legislative Overview:** Rhode Island Senate Bill 2844 would modify the state's flavored e-cigarette restrictions by allowing flavored vapor products to be sold at specialty vape shops operating as adult-only retailers.
- **Core Policy Change:** The bill creates a regulatory framework permitting flavored e-cigarette sales in dedicated vape shops restricted to consumers aged 21 and older.
- **New Retail Definition:** SB 2844 establishes a statutory definition of an "electronic nicotine-delivery system shop," defined as a retail establishment dedicated to selling vapor products to adults.
- **Adult-Only Retail Requirement:** Vape shops permitted to sell flavored products must operate as 21+ establishments and verify the age of customers before completing sales.
- **Flavor Access Framework:** The legislation allows flavored e-cigarettes only at specialty vapor retailers, while maintaining restrictions at general retail locations.
- **Public Health Funding:** The bill directs 10 percent of revenue from vapor products sold at exempt vape

shops to tobacco cessation programs, creating a new funding stream for tobacco control.

- **Adult Vaping Trends:** In 2024, an estimated 63,540 Rhode Island adults (7 percent) were current e-cigarette users.
- **Recent Growth:** Adult vaping increased 2.9 percent between 2023 and 2024, representing 2,490 additional adult users.
- **Demographics of Adult Users:** Nearly 72.4 percent of adult vapers were over age 25, with almost half between ages 25 and 44.
- **Long-Term Trends:** Since 2016, adult vaping increased 55.6 percent, while adult smoking declined 31.2 percent.
- **Youth Vaping Declines:** Youth vaping in Rhode Island has fallen substantially since its peak.
- **Peak Youth Use:** In 2019, 30.1 percent of Rhode Island high school students reported current e-cigarette use and 48.9 percent had ever tried vaping.
- **Recent Youth Trends:** By 2023, ever-use declined 33.7 percent and current use declined 45.2 percent, falling to 16.5 percent current use.
- **National Youth Declines:** Nationwide youth vaping fell to 5.1 percent in 2025, representing a 74.5 percent decline from 2019.
- **Youth Motivations:** Among Rhode Island students who had ever used e-cigarettes, the most common reason was curiosity (32.9 percent), while only 4

percent cited flavors.

- **National Youth Motivations:** Nationwide surveys similarly show that stress, anxiety, or depression are the most commonly cited reasons for youth vaping.
- **Adult Flavor Preferences:** Surveys of adult vapers show that fruit and dessert flavors are widely used by adults attempting to quit smoking.
- **Market Data:** Between 2019 and 2023, U.S. e-cigarette sales increased 47 percent, with flavored products accounting for 80 percent of sales growth.
- **Retail Compliance Data:** In 2024, the FDA conducted 767 compliance inspections of Rhode Island tobacco retailers, resulting in 138 violations (18 percent).
- **Violation Breakdown:**
 - Cigars: 62.3 percent of violations
 - Cigarettes: 15.9 percent
 - Nicotine pouches: 12.3 percent
 - E-cigarettes: 9.4 percent
- **Specialty Vape Shop Compliance:** Vape specialty retailers were inspected seven times in 2024, resulting in only one violation.
- **Policy Objective:** The legislation attempts to balance youth access restrictions with adult access to harm reduction products.
- **Bottom Line:** SB 2844 would shift Rhode Island toward a regulated specialty retail model that restricts flavored vapor sales to adult-only vape shops while funding cessation programs. The approach seeks to maintain strong youth protections while restoring

access to products that many adults use to move away from combustible cigarettes.

You can read the full analysis here:

<https://www.thr101.org/post/a-new-path-for-harm-reduction-rhode-island-considers-vape-shop-model>

We also encourage you to review THR101's Rhode Island State Profile for comprehensive adult and youth tobacco use data:

<https://www.thr101.org/rhode-island>

As you consider SB 2844, we hope this analysis provides helpful context on how a regulated, adult-only retail framework may better align with current public health trends. With youth use declining and adult demand for reduced-risk alternatives increasing, policies that balance access and enforcement may offer a more effective path forward than broad prohibitions.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to reach out if THR101 can provide additional data or clarification.

Warm regards,
Lindsey Stroud
Founder & President, Tobacco Harm Reduction 101
www.thr101.org
lindsey@thr101.org



Check out Tobacco Harm Reduction 101's Updated Website 

This email was sent from this site.

If you no longer wish to receive this email, change your email preferences here.



L Lindsey Stroud · Mar 12 · 6 min read

A New Path for Harm Reduction: Rhode Island Considers Vape Shop Model



Key Points:

- **Legislative Overview:** Rhode Island Senate Bill 2844 would modify the state's flavored e-cigarette restrictions by allowing flavored vapor products to be sold at specialty vape shops operating as adult-only retailers.
- **Core Policy Change:** The bill creates a regulatory framework permitting flavored e-cigarette sales in dedicated vape shops restricted to consumers aged 21 and older.
- **New Retail Definition:** SB 2844 establishes a statutory definition of an "electronic nicotine-delivery system shop," defined as a retail establishment dedicated to selling vapor products to adults.
- **Adult-Only Retail Requirement:** Vape shops permitted to sell flavored products must operate as 21+ establishments and verify the age of customers before completing sales.
- **Flavor Access Framework:** The legislation allows flavored e-cigarettes only at specialty vapor retailers, while maintaining restrictions at general retail locations.
- **Public Health Funding:** The bill directs 10 percent of revenue from vapor products sold at exempt vape shops to tobacco cessation programs, creating a new funding stream for tobacco control.
- **Adult Vaping Trends:** In 2024, an estimated 63,540 Rhode Island adults (7 percent) were current e-cigarette users.
- **Recent Growth:** Adult vaping increased 2.9 percent between 2023 and 2024, representing 2,490 additional adult users.

- **Demographics of Adult Users:** Nearly 72.4 percent of adult vapers were over age 25, with almost half between ages 25 and 44.
- **Long-Term Trends:** Since 2016, adult vaping increased 55.6 percent, while adult smoking declined 31.2 percent.
- **Youth Vaping Declines:** Youth vaping in Rhode Island has fallen substantially since its peak.
- **Peak Youth Use:** In 2019, 30.1 percent of Rhode Island high school students reported current e-cigarette use and 48.9 percent had ever tried vaping.
- **Recent Youth Trends:** By 2023, ever-use declined 33.7 percent and current use declined 45.2 percent, falling to 16.5 percent current use.
- **National Youth Declines:** Nationwide youth vaping fell to 5.1 percent in 2025, representing a 74.5 percent decline from 2019.
- **Youth Motivations:** Among Rhode Island students who had ever used e-cigarettes, the most common reason was curiosity (32.9 percent), while only 4 percent cited flavors.
- **National Youth Motivations:** Nationwide surveys similarly show that stress, anxiety, or depression are the most commonly cited reasons for youth vaping.
- **Adult Flavor Preferences:** Surveys of adult vapers show that fruit and dessert flavors are widely used by adults attempting to quit smoking.
- **Market Data:** Between 2019 and 2023, U.S. e-cigarette sales increased 47 percent, with flavored products accounting for 80 percent of sales growth.
- **Retail Compliance Data:** In 2024, the FDA conducted 767 compliance inspections of Rhode Island tobacco retailers, resulting in 138 violations (18 percent).
- **Violation Breakdown:**
 - Cigars: 62.3 percent of violations
 - Cigarettes: 15.9 percent
 - Nicotine pouches: 12.3 percent
 - E-cigarettes: 9.4 percent
- **Specialty Vape Shop Compliance:** Vape specialty retailers were inspected seven times in 2024, resulting in only one violation.
- **Policy Objective:** The legislation attempts to balance youth access restrictions with adult access to harm reduction products.
- **Bottom Line:** SB 2844 would shift Rhode Island toward a regulated specialty retail model that restricts flavored vapor sales to adult-only vape shops while funding cessation programs. The approach seeks to maintain strong youth protections while restoring access to products that many adults use to move away from combustible cigarettes.

Legislation in the Ocean State could dramatically impact the tens of thousands of adults who rely on tobacco harm reduction products by permitting the sale of flavored e-cigarette products at retail establishments dedicated to furnishing vapor products and restricting access to underage persons. This would represent a notable shift for a state that enacted a reactionary flavor ban in 2020, which limited adult access to flavored alternatives and disrupted a growing market for less harmful nicotine products.

Senate Bill 2844 would amend the state's tobacco and vape regulatory statutes and create a new statutory definition of an "electronic nicotine-delivery system shop" as "any premises dedicated to the display, sale, distribution, delivery, offering, furnishing, or marketing of electronic nicotine-delivery system products, liquid nicotine containers or vapor products ... to consumers over the age of twenty-one."

SB 2844 would amend existing law regulating restrictions on e-cigarettes by permitting the sale of flavored products only at establishments that are dedicated to selling vapor products. These stores must operate as adult-only (21+) retailers and verify age before sales. By limiting flavored product sales to specialty vape retailers, the bill seeks to restrict youth access while allowing adult consumers to continue purchasing flavored products in controlled retail environments.

The legislation also requires that 10 percent of revenue collected from the sale of electronic nicotine-delivery systems sold by exempt shops be transferred to tobacco cessation programs, creating a dedicated funding stream for tobacco control efforts based on vape shop sales.

This is welcome news for the estimated 63,540 adults aged 18 years or older who were currently using e-cigarettes in 2024 – or 7 percent of Rhode Island's adult population. This was a 2.9 percent increase from 2023 when 6.8 percent of adults were vaping, representing an additional 2,490 vaping adults. Nearly half of all adults who were vaping in the Ocean State in 2024 were between the ages of 25 and 44, while 72.4 percent of all vaping adults

were over the age of 25 years. Since 2016, the percentage of adults using e-cigarettes has increased by 55.6 percent, coinciding with a 31.2 percent decrease in the percentage of adults who were smoking.

The state's ban on flavored e-cigarettes was largely enacted in response to concerns about youth vaping. However, in recent years the percentage of Rhode Island youth who report using e-cigarettes has declined dramatically, and nationwide youth vaping rates have fallen to decade lows.

Similar to nationwide trends, youth vaping peaked in the Ocean State when nearly half (48.9 percent) of Rhode Island high school students reported having ever tried an e-cigarette, while 30.1 percent were "current users," defined as having used the product at least once in the 30 days prior to the survey. Between 2019 and 2023, ever-use dropped by 33.7 percent to 32.4 percent of Rhode Island high school students reporting having ever tried an e-cigarette, while current use declined by 45.2 percent to 16.5 percent of students reporting use in the previous month.

Even more encouraging, according to data recently released by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, youth vaping nationwide declined to 5.1 percent of U.S. middle and high school students being current e-cigarette users in 2025 – a 74.5 percent decline from 2019 when 20 percent of students were currently vaping.

The proposed legislation could also help rectify the flawed assumption that banning flavors is necessary to reduce youth use. Real-world data consistently finds that flavors are not a primary driver of youth experimentation with e-cigarettes.

In 2023, among Rhode Island high school students who had ever used an e-cigarette, the most common reason cited was curiosity, reported by 32.9 percent of students. Only 4 percent cited flavors as a reason for using e-cigarettes. These findings have remained consistent across multiple survey years among students in the Ocean State.

Nationwide data shows similar trends. In 2021, the most common reason for youth e-cigarette use was feelings of anxiety, depression, or stress, reported by 43.4 percent of U.S. middle and high school students who were current e-cigarette users. Only 13.2 percent cited flavors.

While youth are not primarily using e-cigarettes because of flavors, adults – many of whom are former smokers – often rely on flavors as a key factor in switching away from combustible cigarettes and remaining smoke-free. A 2018 survey of nearly 70,000 American adult vapers found that flavors play a vital role in the use of electronic cigarettes. Some 83.2 percent and 72.3 percent of survey respondents reported vaping fruit and dessert flavors, respectively, at least some of the time.

Retail sales data further supports this trend. A 2024 report found a 47 percent increase in e-cigarette sales at U.S. retailers between 2019 and 2023, with flavors including candy, desserts, fruit, menthol, and mint accounting for 80 percent of the sales growth. During the same period, the percentage of U.S. middle and high school students currently using e-cigarettes declined by 70.5 percent.

The legislation also recognizes that responsible retailers in the Ocean State provide reduced-harm alternatives to adults and are not overwhelmingly furnishing these products to minors.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration routinely conducts tobacco retailer compliance inspections using underage decoys attempting to purchase tobacco products. In 2024, the FDA conducted 767 inspections of Rhode Island retailers, resulting in 138 violations – an 18 percent failure rate.

Of those violations, 86 involved the sale of cigars, 22 involved combustible cigarettes, 17 involved oral nicotine pouches, and 13 involved e-cigarettes. Underage cigar sales accounted for 62.3 percent of all FDA tobacco retail check violations in 2024, while combustible cigarettes accounted for 15.9 percent, oral nicotine pouches for 12.3 percent, and e-cigarettes for only 9.4 percent of retail violations. Even more telling, retailers with "vape" or "vapor" in their establishment name were inspected seven times in 2024, resulting in only one violation involving the sale of an e-cigarette product.

Ultimately, Senate Bill 2844 represents a more balanced approach to nicotine regulation in Rhode Island. By permitting flavored e-cigarette sales in adult-only specialty retailers while maintaining age restrictions and funding tobacco cessation programs, lawmakers can better align policy with the

realities of both adult consumer behavior and declining youth use. Allowing regulated access to flavored vapor products may help thousands of Rhode Island adults continue moving away from combustible cigarettes while maintaining strong protections against youth access.

Nothing in this analysis is intended to influence the passage of legislation, and it does not necessarily represent the views of Tobacco Harm Reduction 101.

[Legislation](#) · [Analysis & Commentary](#)

Help Spread the Truth About Tobacco Harm Reduction — Share This Now!

