

Testimony on SB 415, An Act Concerning State Oversight of Hookah Lounges

Aaron Sawar
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Dear Members of the Public Health Committee:

Good Afternoon. My name is Aaron Sawar and my family owns and operates the Shish Kebab House in West Hartford Center. I am delighted to share my personal experiences as well as experience in operating a Hookah Lounge.

In my home country hookahs are everywhere. It is a long time tradition enshrined in middle eastern culture, and is common at many get togethers. Hookahs are typically shared by friends and family, rarely does a person smoke a hookah alone. It is a social device, bringing people together. Many times a hookah can be left untouched for quite some time between being smoked as people converse. Many of my friends and I personally have never smoked a cigarette but we enjoy the occasional hookah session when we are together. This is also noticed at the hookah lounge. We find our customers to occasionally come in when they have friends or family visiting. It is not a daily or even weekly event. Personally, even though being around them everyday, I find myself going weeks before smoking a hookah.

The current laws prohibit hookahs to customers under 18 and no food or drinks are allowed.

Due to how popular hookahs have become in colleges, most of our customers are post college adults who have smoked one in college or while away. Even though they have experienced a hookah in the past we give all customers a quick tutorial on the proper use of a hookah and how to properly use our disposable tips. Every customer receives his own disposable tip. This tip prevents any contact between people sharing a hookah. Hookahs are disassembled and cleaned after every use. Hookahs need to be cleaned out after every use for quality as well as sanitary reasons. If a hookah is used without cleaning it out, the different flavors will ruin the taste and it will also be evident in the color of the water.

The length of a hookah session depends on the smokers. Typically our customers use only half the available tobacco. Only when a large group is involved do we find that the tobacco is mostly used. Another key note would be that we don't actually burn the tobacco as in cigarettes or other methods of smoking which helps keep tar and other carcinogen levels low. Tar is predominantly released from burning of tobacco. We heat the wet tobacco and flavors in order to smoke it. When the mix dries out it becomes harsh and unpleasant to smoke due to the tobacco starting to burn.

In summary I find that this thousands year old tradition which is widely practiced throughout the world is a social and safe past time. We would oppose further regulation, but would be happy to work with you if you decide to pursue this bill further.

Thank You,

Aaron Sarwar
Shish Kebab House