



Public Health Committee
March 2, 2011
American Cancer Society Testimony

RE: S.B. No. 415 An Act Concerning State Oversight Over Hookah Lounges

The American Cancer Society strongly supports SB 415, An Act Concerning State Oversight of Hookah Lounges by expanding the current definition of “smoke” or “smoking” in Sec. 19a-342 to include hookah and waterpipes.

Hookah smoking began in ancient Persia centuries ago and involves burning flavored tobacco in a waterpipe and inhaling the smoke through a long hose. The most common form of tobacco smoked in a hookah is called Maassel, which is sweetened with such flavors as apple, mint, or cappuccino. Hookah smoking is a very social activity with groups of people often passing the mouthpiece from person to person. Hookahs are most common in areas of China, India, Pakistan, and the Eastern Mediterranean region; however, in the last several years’ hookah bars have been gaining in popularity in Western countries including the United States with over 400 in the US as of 2010.

There are many myths about hookah smoking; the most common being that it is not as dangerous as smoking cigarettes. In fact, Hookah smoking as well as breathing secondhand smoke from hookahs carries many of the same health risks as cigarettes and can, in some cases, be even worse.

Hookah smoke, like cigarette smoke, contains significant amounts of cancer causing ingredients, such as arsenic, cobalt, chromium and lead. Additionally, smoke from a hookah contains carbon monoxide (CO) in amounts equal to or greater than that from cigarettes. A hookah user is 8 times more likely to develop an addiction and like cigarette use, hookah use results in increased blood nicotine levels and increased heart rates.

Unlike cigarettes, hookah smoke may also contain charcoal or wood cinder combustion products from the heat source used to burn the tobacco, increasing the cancer-causing agents in the smoke. In fact, Smokers of hookah may be exposed to even more smoke than cigarette smokers because hookah sessions last from 20-80 minutes during which a smoker may inhale as much smoke as that from 100 or more cigarettes.

Hookah smoke is associated with increased risk of disease including cancer, heart disease, lung disease, and adverse effects during pregnancy. In addition, unlike the atmosphere of a cigar bar, the act of sharing a waterpipe mouthpiece increases the user’s risk for communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis.

Additionally, just as with smoking rooms, cigar bars, casinos and private clubs that allow smoking, patrons of hookah lounges are not protected through the use of ventilation systems. As has been illustrated before, ventilation simply does not effectively work. The misconception that a powerful ventilation system will protect customers from the dangers of smoke is pervasive but even the equipment itself comes with manufacturer’s disclaimers to the contrary.

The World Health Organization (WHO) issued an advisory on hookah waterpipe tobacco smoking in 2005 addressing the health effects of hookah smoking and recommended that hookahs and their tobacco should be regulated in the same way as cigarettes and other tobacco products, and that hookahs and hookah tobacco should include strong health warning labels and should be prohibited from making any harm reduction claims.

Most importantly, the WHO recommends that waterpipes should be prohibited in public places in the same manner as cigarette and other tobacco smoking.

The available evidence suggests that smoking hookah waterpipes and being exposed to secondhand smoke from hookahs are associated with a high degree of health risk, including cancer risk. The WHO has recognized the fact that smoking tobacco from a hookah is not a safe alternative to smoking cigarettes and therefore states the importance of including hookahs in all tobacco regulation. The American Cancer Society supports regulation of all tobacco products and passage of strong smoke-free laws to protect people from the harms of secondhand smoke and we urge a favorable report on SB 415.

Thank you.

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