

Thank You Senator Doyle, Representative Taborsak, members of the General Law Committee; my name is Michelle Hamilton, Senior Program Coordinator at Ledge Light Health District and Coordinator of the Groton Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition (also known as the GASP Coalition).

I am here today to speak in favor of House Bill 5360, An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Certain Dangerous Substances, Items and Products to Minors and Prohibiting Certain Persons From Allowing Minors to Possess Alcoholic Liquor in Dwelling Units and on Private Property, which will protect the health and welfare of our State's children.

While House Bill 5360 addresses several issues, I'd like to speak specifically on behalf of the section concerning drug paraphernalia.

Our Coalition closely monitors substance abuse trends and attitudes towards substance use in Groton youth through bi-annual, professionally evaluated youth surveys. While we are proud of the work we have done to reduce and prevent underage drinking, we are concerned with the increase in reported marijuana use among youth and a low perception of harm associated with its use. The trends in Groton are not unique: a recent survey by the National Institute on Drug Abuse documents that daily marijuana use among young adults is at its highest levels since 1991. Another national survey released shows that 17 million Americans — mostly teens or young adults — used pot in 2010. About 40% of those used it on 20 or more days in the past month, up from 36.7% in 2009.

It is already illegal to sell drug paraphernalia; the difficulty we face is the availability of items that are marketed for tobacco use but are commonly used for drug use. Ask any police officer who has confiscated a pipe, bong or hookah and they will tell you, it wasn't being used for tobacco. But stores avert federal laws by posting "For tobacco use only" or "Not for use with illicit drugs" signs near paraphernalia. We are dealing with a well known legal "loophole" when it comes to these items.

This loophole means that items commonly used for drug use are visible and accessible in our communities. Staff and student interns at Ledge Light Health District first noticed drug paraphernalia being sold at gas stations and convenience stores when conducting a scan of tobacco marketing in Groton in 2007. Again in 2010, the GASP Street Team, a group of high school freshmen, conducted environmental scans and found convenience stores and gas stations selling drug-related paraphernalia. This included pipes, water pipes, hookahs, grinders and scales. Often these items are found in glass displays near the front door next to soda, candy and ice cream- popular items for our youth to purchase. The open presence of these items normalizes them and conveys to our children that their use is acceptable to us.

Connecticut is not alone in its fight to reduce access to paraphernalia. In 2004, Pierce County Council of Tacoma, Washington adopted a drug paraphernalia ordinance (ordinance number 2005-103) which makes it illegal to deliver, manufacture, advertise, and sell these items in the County. This is one of many communities across the country imposing regulations on paraphernalia in order to close the existing loophole.

I support the House Bill 5360 which aims to regulate the sale of tobacco-related products and would ask that you add language to this bill to state that these items may only be sold at adult-only locations, such as smoke shops which require patrons to show ID upon entrance.

Thank you for your time.