

## PUBLIC HEARING OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE – MARCH 20, 2018

Statement of Margaret Watt, Executive Director, Southwest Regional Mental Health Board

### IN SUPPORT OF

**SB 164:** An Act Raising The Legal Age To Purchase Tobacco To Twenty One

**HB 5293:** An Act Concerning The Sale Of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems And Vapor Products Presented to the Public Health Committee

Distinguished Chairs & members of the Public Health Committee,

I am writing today to urge you to support both of the above-mentioned bills which, together, will protect the public health, in particular the health of our teens, and will be consistent with laws concerning alcohol purchase and use. In brief:

- The health dangers of tobacco are well known and widely researched. Nicotine—just one of the ingredients in a cigarette—is among the most highly addictive substances, and the younger people are when they start smoking, the more likely they are to become addicted.
- A 2015 report (summary here: [http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/TobaccoMinAge/tobacco\\_minimum\\_age\\_report\\_brief.pdf](http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/TobaccoMinAge/tobacco_minimum_age_report_brief.pdf)) examined the implications of having states raise the legal age for tobacco purchase to 21 and 25. The full data shows clearly that **the later legal age is better for health and will save lives.**
- The Tobacco 21 organization, which aims to raise the legal age to 21 state by state, provides an **interesting comparison of what happened when the drinking age was dropped and why it had to be raised again:** <https://tobacco21.org/alcohol-to-21/>
- Meanwhile, **teens today are more likely to use e-cigarettes than traditional cigarettes.** Despite claims that e-cigs may help smokers quit smoking or reduce their levels of smoking, it has become clear that with new smokers, e-cigs can actually be the gateway to traditional cigarettes. In addition, e-cigs and vapes present their own hazards, many of which aren't even fully recognized yet due to the novelty and lack of research time. They are marketed directly to young people, using flavors and colors that appeal to middle schoolers and even younger children. High school interns who work with us on our TurningPointCT.org project (which is a peer support project for young people in CT) report that virtually all their classmates vape throughout the day, even in class. The Surgeon General published this fact sheet to dispel myths: [https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/2016\\_SGR\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_508.pdf](https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/2016_SGR_Fact_Sheet_508.pdf)

The role of adults is to protect youth, and the role of your committee is to protect the public health. The only benefit of enabling easy access to smoking, vaping, and any other nicotine-containing products is raising revenue, while the costs to society are clear. Please support both bills. Thank you.