

“Oral health for all”



March 4, 2019

Public Health Committee  
Legislative Office Building  
300 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford CT 06106

**Testimony in Support of H.B. 7200**  
**An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine**  
**Delivery Systems and Vapor Products to Persons under Age Twenty-One**

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, Executive Director  
The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc.

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinburg, and Honorable Members of the Public Health Committee,

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 7200, An Act Prohibiting the Sale of Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems and Vapor Products to Persons under Age Twenty-One. My name is Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, a non-profit that advocates for protecting and improving oral health across the state of Connecticut. We support this bill because tobacco use, including smoking and vaping or E-cigarette use, is detrimental to oral health and overall health.

Research shows the most effective way to avoid becoming a smoker, is to delay use. The majority (approximately 90%) of adults who smoke daily starting smoking in their teen years.<sup>i</sup> Eighty-percent (80%) of adult smokers starting smoking daily before the age of 21.<sup>ii</sup> We need to delay use in order to prevent life-long, harmful smoking habits. Raising the tobacco age to 21 will decrease high school students' exposure to tobacco products because they are less likely to be in the same social circles as people legally able to purchase tobacco. In turn, the likelihood of initiating tobacco use will decrease.

The Department of Public Health found that nearly 18% of Connecticut high school students are smokers – the majority of that group are E-cigarette users.<sup>iii</sup> While about half of high school smokers try to quit<sup>iv</sup>, the addictive nature of nicotine is difficult to fight, and 3 out of 4 of these teens will become adult smokers.<sup>v</sup> If we fail to address the youth smoking epidemic, 5.6 million of today's youth will die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.<sup>vi</sup>

In addition to the many health implications of tobacco addiction, tobacco use can lead to serious dental problems, including:

- Oral cancer;
- Gum disease with inflammation and infection that contributes to diabetes, heart and lung diseases, poor birth outcomes, and other health conditions;
- Tooth loss;
- Inflammation of salivary glands;
- Delayed healing from mouth surgeries or injuries;
- Loss of bone in the jaw;
- Bad breath and tooth discoloration;
- Buildup of plaque and tartar on the teeth; and
- Other complications.<sup>vii,viii</sup>

E-cigarette use is associated with smoking initiation among youth and can lead to many dental problems, including:

- Mouth and throat dryness and irritation that can lead to infection and inflammation;
- Gum disease leading to possible tooth loss ongoing bad breath (halitosis), bleeding gums, recession of gum tissue;
- Delayed healing of mouth surgeries or injuries;
- Oral cancer<sup>ix</sup>

A number of Connecticut municipalities have already passed local Tobacco 21 ordinances. It is time for Connecticut to join the other states (Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maine, California, Oregon, and Hawaii) who have passed statewide legislation to raise the legal age to purchase tobacco to 21. In doing so, we will decrease tobacco use and nicotine addiction among youth and ultimately improve health, save lives, and reduce health care costs.

### **Friendly Amendment Requested**

I echo my colleagues' request to consider including menthol, mint, and wintergreen to the list of banned characterizing flavors. COHI recommends the following changes:

87 (4) "Characterizing flavor" means a distinguishable taste or aroma,  
88 other than the taste or aroma of tobacco, ~~menthol, mint or wintergreen,~~  
89 imparted prior to or during consumption of a tobacco product,  
90 including, but not limited to, a taste or aroma relating to any fruit,  
91 chocolate, vanilla, honey, candy, cocoa, dessert, alcoholic beverage,  
92 herb or spice;

The Food and Drug Administration found menthol and flavors that cool or numb the throat lead to increased smoking initiation among youth, greater addiction, and decreased success in quitting smoking.<sup>x</sup>

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this legislation with you. I can be reached at 860-246-2644, extension 203 or [pareesa@ctoralhealth.org](mailto:pareesa@ctoralhealth.org).

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH



Executive Director  
The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc.

---

<sup>i</sup>[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)

<sup>ii</sup>United States Department of Health and Human Services. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014. ICPSR36361-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2016-03-22.  
<http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR36361.v1>

<sup>iii</sup><https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Departments-and-Agencies/DPH/dph/hems/tobacco/PDF/2017-CT-High-School-Tobacco-Quick-Stats.pdf?la=en>

<sup>iv</sup>CDC, "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2015," MMWR, 65(6), June 10, 2016.  
[http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2015/ss6506\\_updated.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2015/ss6506_updated.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> HHS, Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2012.

<sup>vi</sup> HHS, The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress, A Report of the Surgeon General, 2014,  
<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/>

<sup>vii</sup>[https://therealcost.betobaccofree.hhs.gov/effects.html?utm\\_source=bing&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=Tobacco%20Effects%209%2F14&utm\\_term=%2Btobacco%20%2Beffects&utm\\_content=Tobacco%20Effects](https://therealcost.betobaccofree.hhs.gov/effects.html?utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=Tobacco%20Effects%209%2F14&utm_term=%2Btobacco%20%2Beffects&utm_content=Tobacco%20Effects)

<sup>viii</sup><http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/smoking-and-tobacco>

<sup>ix</sup><https://www.deltadentalwa.com/blog/entry/2018/06/ecigarettes-vaping-dental-health>

<sup>x</sup>FDA. Preliminary Scientific Evaluation of the Possible Public Health Effects of Menthol versus Nonmenthol Cigarettes (2013).