

January 31, 2020

Comments in opposition to Raised Bill No. 326

To the members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Kenneth Coomes, I am a lifelong resident of CT. For nearly 22 years I was a licensed gasoline and cigarette dealer. Currently I work for a motor fuel distributor supplying over 20 gas stations and convenience stores in CT. I would like to share my thoughts in opposition to the proposed legislation. Your consideration is greatly appreciated.

Legislating people's behavior is ineffective. Free people can, and do, make their own choices. Ultimately it is they who live with the success of their decisions or suffer the consequences of them.

However, you can't legislate what actions and behaviors are determinantal to the good of society.

You can legislate the fines and penalties thru statute to discourage these activities.

You can use the "bully pulpit" of government, including the vast public education system, to provide your constituency with timely and accurate information so they may make informed decisions.

There are numerous laws on the books regulating cigarette and tobacco product sales. Unfortunately, the enforcement of many of these laws is severely lacking. The sale of untaxed cigarettes and "loosies" is widespread in CT. The nefarious sorts who run these markets are industrious. They have found ways to evade taxes, they will most certainly discover ways to circumvent the flavor ban.

Now, let us move on to the topic of behavior reform thru education. I recently learned that the State of Connecticut spends NOTHING for tobacco use prevention programs. We are rated LAST in the nation among the states. This state receives over \$450 million in tobacco tax related income, it is disheartening that NONE of these funds are allocated to such a worthy cause. This is based on information found on the "TobaccoFreeKids.org" web site.

Unintended consequences, prohibition and the Volstead Act.

History shows that, while well intentioned, this legislation did not work out very well. There was a demand for alcohol, and that demand was met. Al Capone, and many other brutal criminals made fortunes through bootlegging. It is also noted that the early fortune amassed by one of America's political dynasties was tied to bootlegging. Fast forward 100 years, I envision peddlers cruising the streets of Bridgeport with trunks full of Newports for sale in the spirit of Papa Joe.

In conclusion, while I realize that revenue and finance are typically not considerations of the Public Health Committee, I ask you to ponder this. Your actions have consequences. This legislation has caused a great deal of stress for many small business owners in CT. Furthermore, the loss of revenue will impose even more stress and anguish among the CT taxpayers who will be looked upon to make up the resultant shortfall.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Kenneth Coomes