

Testimony offered by Robert Dudley, MD, MEd, FAAP, Immediate Past President,
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in **favor** of

S.B. No. 326 (RAISED) AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE OF FLAVORED CIGARETTES, TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ELECTRONIC NICOTINE DELIVERY SYSTEMS AND VAPOR PRODUCTS

Submitted January 31, 2021

Dear Joint Senate and House Public Health Committee Chairs, Ranking Members and Committee Members:

I am Rob Dudley, a primary care pediatrician from New Britain and the immediate past president of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am testifying on behalf of our nearly 700 pediatrician members in favor of S.B. No. 326 (raised). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this important issue.

E-Cigarettes are the most commonly-used tobacco products among youth, and use is rising at an alarming rate. In 2018, 21% of high school students and 5% of middle school students reported having used e-cigarettes in the last 30 days. This represents an increase of 1.5 million youth from 2017-2018.

As a school medical advisor, I am hearing about the explosion of vaping at middle and high schools across the state. Many schools now have to close or monitor their bathrooms due to E-cigarette use. Data through 2020 indicate a continued steep climb in teen vaping.

E-Cigarettes contain a liquid solution that is usually flavored. Flavors, which are appealing to children, can include fruit flavors, candy, coffee, piña colada, peppermint, bubble gum, or chocolate. These are often marketed in bright colors using popular imagery.

Studies show that flavors play a major role in youth use of tobacco products such as e-cigarettes and cigars: A government study found that 81 percent of kids who have ever used tobacco products started with a flavored product, including 81 percent who have ever tried e-cigarettes and 65 percent who have ever tried cigars. Youth also cite flavors as a major reason for their current use of non-cigarette tobacco products, with 81.5 percent of youth e-cigarette users and 73.8 percent of youth cigar users saying they used the product "because they come in flavors I like."

Tobacco companies have a long history of developing and marketing flavored tobacco products as "starter" products that attract kids. Flavors improve the taste and reduce the harshness of tobacco products, making them more appealing and easier for beginners – often kids – to try the product and ultimately become addicted. Since most tobacco users start before age 18, flavored tobacco products play a critical role in the industry's marketing playbook. Flavors can also create the impression that a product is less harmful than it really is.

This issue is also one of health equity- tobacco companies have historically targeted menthol flavored products to communities of color; as a result 85% of adult Black Americans who smoke cigarettes are smoking menthol cigarettes, compared to 29% of white smokers. Menthol boosts nicotine's effects, making cigarettes more addictive. Most African American youth start smoking with menthol flavored products. Removing them from stores is an important step in reducing the disparities in tobacco related mortality suffered by this community.

As pediatricians we take the long view on preventative health for our patients. Flavorings in tobacco products pose a danger of lifelong nicotine addiction, with all the associated morbidity and mortality that we have fought so hard to reduce over the past couple decades. Please support this common sense legislation to protect our youth. Thank you.