

**Public Health Committee**  
Public Hearing – February 8, 2021  
**SB 326 AA Prohibiting The Sale Of Flavored Cigarettes, Tobacco Products, Electronic Nicotine  
Delivery Systems and Vapor Products**  
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**Past President, Board Member, Connecticut Chapter of the American Heart Association**  
**Past Board Member: Founders Board of Directors American Heart Association**

My name is Seth Lapuk. I am a Pediatric Cardiologist at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Connecticut. I am the past president and a current board member of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Heart Association and past Board Member of the Founders Affiliate/Eastern States Board of the American Heart Association. But most importantly, I am a concerned citizen of the State of Connecticut and I urge you to support SB 326.

Tobacco use is not just a professional concern for me, this is a personal issue as well. Both of my parents began smoking in their early teens. At that time, we did not have the information we do today regarding the devastating health effects and costs of tobacco use and addiction. Of course now we have had this information for some 40+ years but due to savvy tobacco advertising and tobacco company greed smoking addiction still is an enormous health issue. And we all pay the cost.

I watched my father's quality of life deteriorate significantly over the last 30 years of his life as a result of his lifelong addiction to smoking. He tried numerous times from about age 40 onward to break his habit but was unable to quit even with all the available smoking cessation aids. He tried them all. His smoking caused him to develop debilitating chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and bladder cancer. Both of these severely impacted his later life, limiting his activity to at best a brisk walk before exhaustion for over 20 years. I now watch my mother suffering through her extreme shortness of breath secondary to tobacco related COPD. She was able to quit smoking 30 years ago but has never and will never regain her lung function.

There is strong data that if a person does not begin smoking before the age of 18 they virtually never will start. This may be because the immature brain is more susceptible to the effects of nicotine or immature decision-making capabilities, impulse control or susceptibility to advertising and peer pressure. Of course, the tobacco companies take advantage of these developmental immaturities. Given that upwards of 80% of youth smokers will continue smoking as adults the obvious time to intervene would be in adolescence.

The use of electronic cigarette products has skyrocketed amongst our youth. Between 2011 and 2018 the use of electronic cigarettes among high school students as increased from 1.5% up to 20.8% with a 78% increase between 2017 in 2018. The use of designer flavors in these products is of course to slowly increase their sales. The nicotine that is ubiquitous in these products, often at extremely high concentrations, is of course to addict our youth. Despite the FDA's ban on flavored cigarettes other than menthol, the overall market for flavored tobacco products is growing. Continuing a long tradition of designing products that appeal explicitly to new users, tobacco companies in recent years have significantly stepped up the introduction and marketing of flavored other tobacco products (OTPs), particularly e-cigarettes and cigars, as well as smokeless tobacco

and hookah. This includes menthol flavoring. The rate of menthol cigarette use has been increasing. With their colorful packaging and sweet flavors, today's flavored tobacco products are often hard to distinguish from the candy displays near which they are frequently placed in retail outlets.

There is growing strong evidence of the significant association of electronic cigarette use and subsequent initiation of tobacco cigarettes by the children of the United States. A recent study of over 6000 children between the ages of 12 and 15 years of age and conducted over a 3-year period published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that there was a 4-fold or more increase in future use of combustible cigarette use in this group of children compared to those who did not use electronic cigarettes. In the low risk categorized subgroup of children (those without high-risk behavior tendencies) had almost a 9-fold increase in future combustible tobacco use when compared to children who did not use electronic cigarettes. The authors of this article calculated that a significant percentage of future tobacco use in adults is directly attributable to the use of electronic cigarette products in children.

Tobacco use remains the #1 preventable cause of early coronary artery disease in adults. It causes chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, bladder cancer and the disease list goes on and on. Aside from the devastating impact such diseases have on the individual and their families, the societal costs of treating these patients is enormous. The annual health care costs in Connecticut directly related to smoking is over \$2 billion. The Medicaid costs alone are over one half billion dollars. The smoking caused productivity losses in Connecticut have been estimated at \$1.25 billion annually.

I spend most of my day treating patients with relatively rare congenital heart disease. Although this is important and appropriate, the health impact of my work at a population/societal level are trivial compared to the effects we can have in the state of Connecticut on the health of all our citizens by implementing all strategies for decreasing tobacco use. Any actions that our state can take to prevent initiation of tobacco use in our children should be vigorously pursued.

I respectfully request your support in passing this bill out of committee to include **ALL tobacco products to include menthol cigarettes.**

Thank you for your time and considerations.  
Sincerely,

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