

## **Testimony of Raquel Rivera, Bridgeport, CT**

Senator Abrams, Representative Jonathan Steinberg, and other members of the Public Health Committee:

As a chef and an educator who works closely with a broad cross-section of people in the Greater Bridgeport area, and as a mother of two young sons, I want to voice my full support for SB 326 to prohibit the sale of all flavored tobacco products in our state.

Whether you're talking about crazy e-cigarette flavors like Unicorn Poop, or flavors like menthol – which has been around so long we've almost gotten used to it. All of these flavors were designed by the industry to do one thing: Addict our kids to tobacco. You know that's what they're trying to do when the end result is that 90% of tobacco users start before they even turn 18 and the overwhelming majority of them start with mint, menthol or another flavor.

I've heard what the opposition is saying about this bill and I have to admit, I'm shocked to hear them talking about money. With all due respect, how can a convenience store or vaping shop owner put his or her revenue stream from these addictive flavored tobacco products above the health of my kids and community?

It doesn't matter if your store would never sell tobacco products to minors, you're bringing a product into our communities that hooks our kids, and if these products are available, you KNOW kids will get them. The evidence proves that's the case. I know that some adults use these products, but to rationalize the addiction of future generations on the basis of keeping a deadly product available for older generations who got trapped into addiction years ago is the very definition of "sacrifice". And I for one do not think we should sacrifice any children just to make sure that adults can continue to vape bubble gum, or gummy bear, or cotton candy flavors instead of plain old tobacco flavored e-cigarettes

I need to earn a living too so I understand the need to make a buck. But if I prepared products as a chef that ended up being addicting kids to a product that is the leading preventable cause of death, disease, and disability in our country, I'd change the menu.

We need to stand together for policies that will, during and after COVID-19, make our communities stronger and healthier. How can we believe in the promise of the next generation, if you're going to sell them out to Big Tobacco?

We need to prohibit the sale of all flavored tobacco products now -- at a time when COVID-19 has disproportionately devastated the lungs and lives of communities of color.

Raquel Rivera, Chef/Owner

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