

Shanika Rucker, Owner & psychotherapist of Cathartic Breakthroughs, LLC

Bill to: S.B. No. 326

As a black woman born and raised in Bridgeport, CT I fell victim to stereotypes and generational cycles that perpetuate society's negative narrative of black and brown people:

- My parents divorced when I was 12,
- I was pregnant at 15,
- gave birth at 16,
- receiving government assistance at 17,
- and started smoking Newport cigarettes with my peers at 18.

Seeing my parents and friends smoke so often, I bought a pack of Newport and tried it out of pure curiosity. I did not enjoy the first cigarette and could not understand the desire to have that disgusting aftertaste in my mouth. However, I was a single mother and would not waste a whole pack of Newports. By the end of that pack, I found myself at the neighborhood corner store, buying another pack.

I saw where my life was headed and it was not ok. I vowed to break these unhealthy cycles and not continue these stereotypes for my daughter so

- I worked full-time,
- cared for my daughter,
- bought a home,
- graduated Housatonic Community College, University of Bridgeport, and Fordham University with my Masters in Social Work
- became highly involved in nonprofit and grassroots organizations to uplift the Bridgeport community

Those accomplishments are commendable but one thing I could not achieve was to stop smoking Newport cigarettes. Over the 18 years, I tried to quit smoking cigarettes about 15 times and 15 different ways. Until June 2018, I went on my own personal journey that ended with me not smoking another cigarette to this day.

Adolescents are highly impressionable and tobacco companies are well aware. Speaking on behalf of myself and generations that follow, please hear us and understand that this among many other targeted strategies MUST STOP.