

March 1, 2024

Testimony In Support of S.B. 340 AN ACT CONCERNING TOBACCO DEALER LICENSE RENEWALS.

I would like to thank Distinguished Co-Chairs Senator Representative Boyd and Senator Gaston, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of S.B. 340 which proposes new requirements for tobacco licensing, including approval from the local police chief.

I have served as the Health Director of the City of New Haven for the past four years working to protect the health and wellbeing of community members. While the traditional cigarette smoking rate has thankfully declined, we are facing a continuing and alarming trend – significant e-cigarette and marijuana use amongst youth. Even though the research by the CDC and FDA has concluded the use of e-cigarettes is unequivocally unsafe for kids, teens, and young adults, 2019 data showed nearly 28% of Connecticut high school students had used some form of tobacco, including cigarettes, cigars, e-cigarettes at least once in the past 30 days, and nearly 30% of students in Connecticut who currently use electronic vapor products use them daily. Nationally, more than 1 in 4 youth use e-cigarettes daily and almost 9 out of 10 use flavored e-cigarettes; these products have a laundry list of known side effects:

- These products all contain nicotine which is harmful to the developing brain and exposure can lead to problems with learning, memory, attention, and impulse control;
- E-cigarette aerosol that users breathe from the device and exhale can contain harmful and potentially harmful substances including ultrafine particles, flavorings, volatile organic compounds, carcinogens, and heavy metals. Vaping can irritate the lungs and damage lung tissue, leading to coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Long-term use may increase the risk of chronic lung diseases such as asthma and COPD.
- Vaping can also increase the risk of heart problems, stroke, and even cancer;
- Tobacco use among high school students is associated with poor mental health (i.e. depression and suicidality), low academic achievement, and school absenteeism

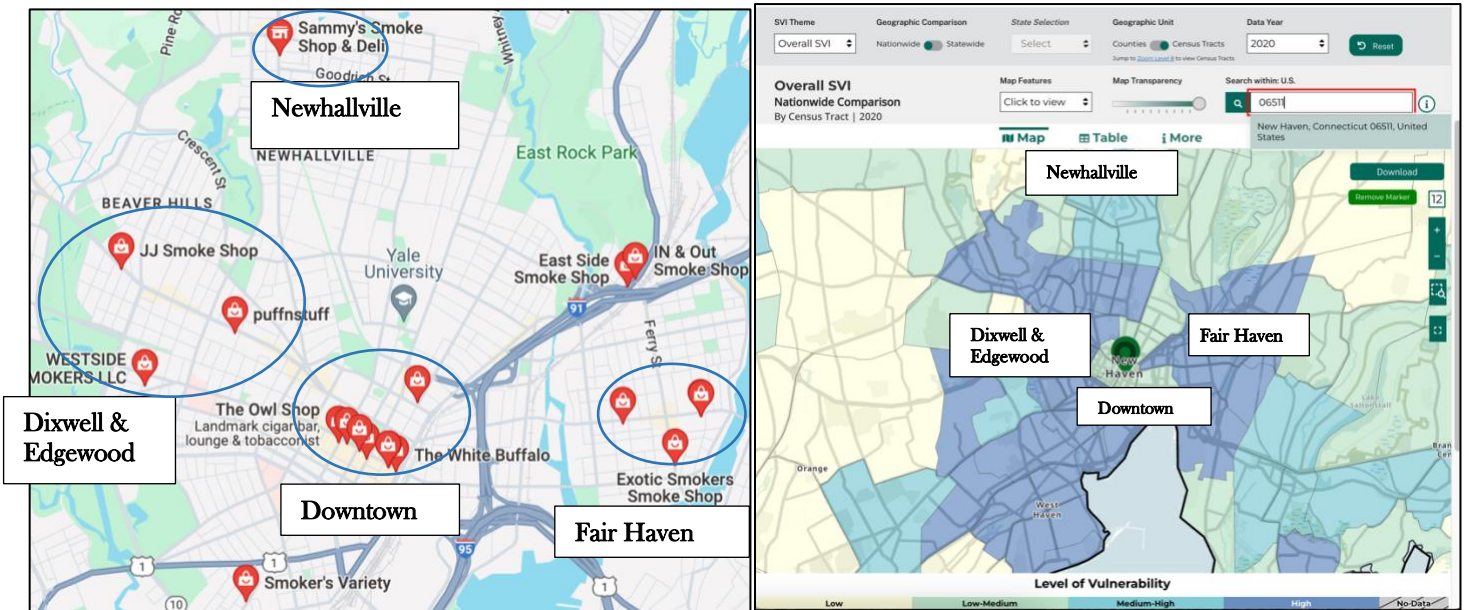
Though the full range of health effects of e-cigarette use among children, including long-term effects, is not yet known, the data linking youth tobacco use to negative health outcomes is definitive. However, youth are being targeted by the tobacco industry with products often marketed with appealing flavors like bubblegum, “cherry crush,” and “banana split” and in colorful packaging. In New Haven, middle school students walk from school straight to the smoke shop and smoke shops have been caught illegally sell to underaged kids. Local pediatricians have patients experiencing nicotine addiction waking up two or three times a night to vape.

S.B. 340 proposes a critical step in addressing this issue by requiring police chiefs to approve tobacco licensing renewals. Currently, tobacco license violations, including sales to minors, carry fines to frontline sellers but no penalties to licensees or escalation for repeat offenders. Law enforcement and communities currently have inadequate recourse to address tobacco licensees that repeatedly sell products to minors (among other violations) and/or are associated with other law enforcement issues. This gap contributes to increased rates of underage and early addiction to tobacco products, as well as illegal activity in and around tobacco licensee businesses.

The goal of S.B. 340 is twofold: (1) deter tobacco license violations, such as sales to minors, and achieve associated public health and revenue collection benefits and (2) deter illegal activity and community violence in and around establishments that sell tobacco, including corner stores and smoke shops. Should tobacco establishments understand their licensing renewal is dependent on maintaining legal operations, we can reduce the number of youth tobacco use rate and improve the health of the broader community.

However, I urge the Committee to add a provision for residents to object to tobacco license renewals, similar to the remonstrance process outlined for liquor permit renewals in Sec. 30-39(4)(c). Businesses that sell tobacco, e-cigarettes, and marijuana, commonly called “smoke shops” are disproportionately located in vulnerable communities already saddled with the effects pollution, environmental justice burdens, and poor health outcomes due to racist zoning practices like redlining. In New Haven, a Google Map search of the term “smoke shop” shows seven businesses along the same downtown stretch, just one minute walking distance from a public high school, community college, and university, that has restaurants and bars, typically bustling with young people (see Figure 1 below). There are three smoke shops in Fair Haven to the west, three in Dixwell and Edgewood to the east, and one in Newhallville to the north. These neighborhoods are classified by the CDC as having a medium-high to high level of social vulnerability (census tracts shaded in blue and purple)—meaning they are especially at risk during public health emergencies because of factors like socioeconomic status, disability status, and household characteristics like children and older adults (see Figure 2 below). The disproportionate presence of smoke shops in these communities is further worsening health disparities and is exploiting already disadvantaged communities for profit; in New Haven, the smoking rate among adults with an annual income of \$30k or more is 9%, but among adults with an income of less than \$30k, the rate is 22%, more than double the statewide average of 12%. Though all the businesses are operating legally, there are typically lower barriers to entry and laxer zoning restrictions in low-income communities and communities members have fewer resources to enforce existing regulations, even when public safety and nuisance issues arise. Adding a provision for residents to object to tobacco license renewals in their communities would empower community members to organize around public safety, public health, and quality of life concerns.

(L) Figure 1: Google Map screenshot of “smoke shops” in New Haven
(R) Figure 2: CDC Social Vulnerability Index by Census Tract in New Haven



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Everyone has the right to live in a community that promotes health and well-being. S.B. 340 will help achieve this goal by protecting vulnerable communities, especially Connecticut's youth from the harmful effects of tobacco use. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 340 and please feel free to contact me at healthdirector@newhavenct.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Bond". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Maritza Bond, MPH
Director of Health
City of New Haven Health Department