



Testimony of

*New York State Congress of Parents & Teachers
(NYS Parent Teacher Association)*

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My name is Amany Messieha Dgheim, Wellness Coordinator of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA). On behalf of nearly 300,000 members of NYS PTA and the parents and families of our 2.6 million New York school children, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the harms of electronic cigarettes and vaping, especially among school-aged youth.

Thank you to Senator Kevin Thomas, Senator Gustavo Rivera and Senator Shelley Mayer and members of the Senate Standing Committees on Consumer Protection, Health and Education for conducting today's public hearing regarding the potential harms of electronic cigarettes and vaping. Your dedicated work protecting New York State consumer interests, health and education, including our most vulnerable citizens, children and youth, should be commended and we thank you for it.

At PTA, we speak for every child and family, with one voice, and strive for collaborative conversations with legislators, educators, as well as health organizations, several of which are represented in today's hearing, to develop solutions and protect children and youth.

Tobacco use leads to disease as well as disability and harms almost all organs of the human body. More than 16 million Americans are living with a disease caused by smoking and many have lost their lives due to smoking related complications. Cancer, heart disease, stroke, lung disease, including chronic obstructive lung disease (COLD/COPD), emphysema and chronic bronchitis, eye disease, immune system disease, such as rheumatoid arthritis, are the most common illnesses many smokers have suffered and/or died from.

Secondhand smoke exposure alone contributed to approximately 41,000 deaths among nonsmoking adults and 400 deaths in infants each year. Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome. They are also at risk for acute respiratory infections, middle ear disease, severe asthma and other respiratory conditions, including a stunted lung growth, all of which can have serious implications on growth and development with negative debilitating outcomes affecting them for their entire life.

A significant number of youth and young adults are using electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), which provide a relatively new way to deliver the addictive substance, nicotine, without burning tobacco. The number of youth using e-cigarettes is alarming and raises serious concerns that e-cigarettes could be an entryway to nicotine addiction and use of regular cigarettes for some children and youth.

According to the National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), released by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), e-cigarettes have been the most commonly used tobacco product among youth since 2014. Five million youths were current e-cigarette users in 2019 - an increase of nearly 3 million students since 2017.

A recent CDC study found that 99% of the e-cigarettes sold in assessed venues in the U.S. contained nicotine. Some e-cigarette labels do not disclose that they contain nicotine, and some marketed as containing 0% nicotine have been found to contain it.

As scientists continue to study the long-term effects of e-cigarettes, more harmful effects continue to be discovered. For example, “Popcorn Lung” disease, or bronchiolitis obliterans, is one that has surfaced in recent years due to the chemical diacetyl often added to “e-juice” liquid by e-cigarette manufacturers to complement flavorings such as vanilla, maple, coconut and more. In fact, recent studies have found that more than 75% of flavored e-cigarettes and refill liquids tested positive for diacetyl. Unfortunately popcorn lung is irreversible, often misdiagnosed, because it most commonly presents with a dry cough and shortness of breath, and, when missed and not treated, can lead to death.

Among reasons the use of e-cigarettes is unsafe for humans, particularly children, teens, and young adults:

- Nicotine, a highly addictive chemical, can harm the developing adolescent brain which continues to develop until the age of 25.
- Using nicotine in adolescence can harm areas of the brain that control attention, learning, mood and impulse control. It alters the way synapses, or connections, are built between brain cells, a process which occurs at a much faster rate in brains of youths compared to older adults.
- An e-cigarette “pod” delivers the same amount of nicotine as a full pack of 20 cigarettes.
- Young adults who use e-cigarettes are more likely to smoke conventional cigarettes in the future.
- The use of nicotine in adolescence has been tied to an increased risk for future addiction to other drugs.
- Chemicals in flavored e-cigarettes and refill liquids can cause irreversible damage to the lungs of children and youth which may lead to death.
- Defective e-cigarette batteries have caused fires, explosions, and serious accidents.
- Children have been poisoned by swallowing, breathing or absorbing e-cigarette liquid through the skin or eyes. Nationally approximately 50% of calls to poison control centers for e-cigarettes are for children 5 years of age or younger.

New York State PTA has supported legislation passed on July 16, 2019 to raise the age to purchase tobacco and electronic cigarette products from 18 to 21, to take effect on November 13, 2019.

New York State PTA also previously supported and vigorously advocated for legislation passed in 2017 which included electronic cigarettes in the Clean Indoor Air Act and banned their use on school grounds and every place where smoking products are prohibited.

According to the Center for Disease Control and numerous reliable public health experts, e-cigarette use has become an epidemic among our nation’s young people. The dramatic increase in the use of e-cigarettes by youth is clearly driven by deceptive marketing strategies including

flavoring and the sale of vaping tools camouflaged as everyday items youth and children use at home and in school. Items such as USB drives, pens and clothing zipper pulls, to name a few, provide conspicuous tools that add to the excitement and rush of feeling mischievous and able to fool the adults in charge including parents, teachers, coaches, etc.

E-liquid flavors such as gummy bear, cotton candy, mango, banana smash, bubble gum, cherry cola and smooth menthol clearly target children and youth contributing to the early onset of addictive behavior, fixation, chemical dependence and ultimately addiction. Moreover, the marketing of these and many other flavored e-liquids adds to the false belief that they are not harmful to users.

In fact, researchers have identified more than 15,000 unique e-cigarette flavors available online. Unfortunately, given their colorful packaging and sweet flavors, flavored tobacco products have become hard to distinguish from candy displays in stores.

97% of youth e-cigarette users have used a flavored product in the prior month and over 70% of youth e-cig smokers say they use them “because they come in flavors I like”. Menthol e-cigarettes are specifically designed by manufacturers as a “starter” product to get young people hooked on tobacco.

As a result, according to the New York State Department of Health data, nearly 40 percent of 12th grade students and 27 percent of high school students in New York State are now using e-cigarettes, and this increase is largely driven by flavored e-liquids. High school use in 2018 (27.4%) is 160 percent higher than it was in 2014 (10.5%).

Conclusion

New York State PTA supports and applauds the Governor’s Executive Action to ban the sale of e-cigarettes in New York State.

New York State PTA supports Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal’s (A00047) and Senator Brad Hoylman’s (S00428) Bills which seek to “Prohibit the sale and distribution of flavored e-liquid which creates a distinguishable flavor or aroma for use in e-cigarettes.”

We commend county-level initiatives and counties locally taking action to ban e-flavors, and we strongly support the banning of all flavored e-cigarettes and e-liquid flavors, including mint and menthol.

We must work together, aligning and coordinating efforts to reverse this epidemic. We owe it to New York State’s and the nation’s young people to protect them from the detrimental risks of e-cigarettes. We must take action, now, to protect the health and wellness of our nation’s young people.

Thank you.