



Joint Committee on Public Health
July 16, 2019
Testimony of Attorney General Maura Healey
(As prepared for delivery)

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Comerford, Chairman Mahoney, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

I'm here to express my support for H.1902 and S.1279, *An Act regulating flavored tobacco products*.

Thank you to the sponsors, Senator Keenan and Representative Gregoire, for their leadership on this important issue.

In Massachusetts, vaping among young people has become a public health epidemic. Almost half of Massachusetts high school students have tried vaping and nearly 1 in 4 vapes regularly.

This is now the number one issue I hear about from parents and young people in every community.

A school nurse estimated that 80% of her high school students are vaping. Another school official said they confiscated more than 200 devices last school year.

Recently I was visiting with about 20 students at a middle school – 12 and 13-years old – and asked: “How many of you have a friend that vapes?”

Every hand went up.

The students went on to say they have friends who could not stop if they wanted to – they have friends who are addicted.

I've heard from a pediatrician who has a patient so addicted that she sleeps with the device under her pillow because she cannot get through the night without taking a "hit."

And parents have shared heartbreaking stories about their children's struggles to quit.

Worst of all, most teens have no idea about the health risks – most think these devices are only water vapor and flavoring.

In reality, these pods contain nicotine concentrations that we know are equivalent to an entire pack of cigarettes or more. And there is a race to get products with even higher concentrations on the market and into kids' hands.

A generation ago, Big Tobacco made a fortune by following a simple strategy: get people hooked while they are young.

Today, vaping companies have taken a page right out of the Big Tobacco playbook – marketing to kids on social media, flouting age verification laws, and minimizing the health risks and addictive nature of their products.

They are selling candy, fruit and dessert-flavored liquids that smell and taste like sour gummy worms, apple juice, chocolate cake, and bubblegum.

My office is doing everything we can to stop them: from investigating JUUL Labs, to shutting down online e-cigarette retailers that violate our laws, to suing Eonsmoke, a vaping company that markets and sells its products to children with flavors like "gummy bear" and "cotton candy."

But to curb this epidemic, we also must ban the sale of these dangerous flavored products that plainly and unmistakably appeal to youth.

80% of young people cite flavor as a primary reason they started using tobacco products. And the research is clear – flavors in tobacco products increase their appeal to youth and promote initiation.

The good news is – we know what works. We've fought Big Tobacco before and won. We need to use that same strategy here.

We need to treat all tobacco products like traditional cigarettes and ban all flavors, across the board.

This bill will do just that.

It will ban flavored products in all stores – online and brick-and-mortar.

Tobacco companies have designed and marketed these products to get another generation of young people hooked on nicotine, and we must do all we can to stop them.

I urge you to report this bill out favorably.

As always, my office stands ready to provide any additional information that may be helpful as you move forward.

Thank you.