

House Bill 7200 Testimony

Dear Public Health Committee members,

My name is Gabrielle Diaz and I am a graduate student in the Masters of Public Health (MPH) program at Sacred Heart University (SHU) in Fairfield, Connecticut. In addition to being a student, I am a Bridgeport, Connecticut resident and a graduate research assistant for the SHU MPH program. The most important role that I take on as a student is being an advocate for better health, specifically preventing the use of tobacco and e-cigarettes on campus. Today, I am writing to support a statewide policy that will improve the health of Connecticut citizens by 1) restricting the sale of combustible and electronic cigarettes to those age 21 years old and 2) prohibiting flavored tobacco products and nicotine products.

Tobacco 21 is an opportunity that the state of Connecticut should not pass on. It can prevent youth from using products that contain nicotine that can and will lead to addiction. Sacred Heart University has provided me with the opportunity to work with undergraduates, faculty, and other researchers to study vape use on campus. The study has shown that a majority (70%) of students have tried vaping with e-cigarettes, including Juul. Those who are daily users today started at a younger age and are more likely to modify their device with other drugs, such as marijuana, which is illegal in Connecticut.

As an older sister and concerned friend, it is disheartening to watch those who I know and have grown up with become addicted to these products. In the past they have expressed concern to me that they want to stop and feel as if it has taken over their life. My two younger brothers—one who is 17 and one who is 9—are exposed to e-cigarette use in their schools and community. My 17 year old brother has told me on multiple occasions that his teachers have had to stop other students who use e-cigarettes during school hours. It is unfair to him and others, who aren't users, that their education is being disrupted by this problem. I am worried that the popularity of vaping devices among youth will continue to grow, which will lead to long-term health issues.

E-cigarette use among youth is a public health threat that needs to be taken seriously. This is a perfect opportunity for the state of Connecticut to fight back and protect the health and well-being of our youth. By restricting the sale of e-cigarettes to those under 21 years old and prohibiting flavored tobacco and nicotine products, we will help our youth and all those who care about them. As a student, sister, friend, and advocate, I can't express my concern for this issue enough and strongly urge you to support the statewide policy.

Sincerely,

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