



**Testimony of Melanie Sue Collins, MD, Pediatric Pulmonologist
and Alyssa S. Bennett, MD Adolescent Medicine Specialist
at Connecticut Children's
to the Public Health Committee regarding
HB 5020 *An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding
Public Health*
March 6, 2020**

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, and other esteemed members of the Public Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts about House Bill 5020, *An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Public Health*, specifically Sections 1-6 related to vaping and tobacco products.

Our names are Dr. Melanie Sue Collins and Dr. Alyssa Bennett and, respectively, we work as a Pediatric Pulmonologist and the Division Head of Adolescent Medicine at Connecticut Children's. We are submitting this testimony in support of this proposed legislation because banning flavors in vaping products and increasing penalties for selling tobacco products to those under 21 years of age will help prevent adolescents from trying and becoming addicted to vaping, nicotine, and tobacco products.

Before commenting on the bill, we want to provide some background about Connecticut Children's, a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 2,900 employees and 1,190 on our medical staff, we are the only hospital in the State dedicated exclusively to the care of children. Our focus on children differentiates us from all other hospitals in Connecticut in several key ways including: our payer mix—more than half of our care is for patients who rely on Medicaid and we receive almost no Medicare payments; our exclusion from the provider tax—which means we were not part of the hospital lawsuit and recent settlement; and our costs, which are predictably higher because children need more hands-on care (more than half of our inpatient care is for infants and 70% is for children under age 6).

E-cigarettes and vaping products contain harmful substances such as heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, cancer causing chemicals, and ultrafine particles that can be inhaled deeply into the lungs. We also know that just one JUUL pod can contain as much nicotine as 20 cigarettes and that over 2,600 Americans have suffered severe lung damage due to EVALI (E-cigarette, or Vaping, Product Use-Associated Lung Injury). Despite these scary facts, 1 in 10 ninth graders and 1 in 5 twelfth graders are currently using e-cigarettes (Connecticut Youth Tobacco Survey, 2017). As pediatricians and as policymakers, we should be doing all that we can to prevent children from being exposed to this harmful and addictive practice and this bill takes important steps toward that goal.

There is no doubt that non-traditional flavors in vaping products, like fruit and candy, especially appeal to young people. As demonstrated in a study published in *Pediatrics* in December 2019, 93.8% of children who vape are vaping these non-traditional flavors. This study also showed that these types of flavors were associated with increased number of puffs per vaping session as well as the continuation of vaping. Studies from the CDC also tell us that nicotine use in

adolescence may increase the risk for future addiction to other drugs. It is critically important that we prevent youth from trying nicotine containing products through vaping, as they are extremely addicting and can have lifelong and costly health implications.

Thank you for your consideration of this position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Jane Baird, Connecticut Children's Senior Director of External Relations, at 860-837-5557.