

Public Health Committee Hearing March 6, 2020

**Testimony regarding HB 5020 in SUPPORT of a
prohibition on the sale of all flavored e-cigarette products,
Submitted by Geralyn Laut, BS, MA, CPP, CTTTS**

My name is Geralyn Laut and I reside at 126 South Mill Drive in Glastonbury, CT.

I am here today to speak to you in my personal behalf but also as Member and Representative of the Board of Directors of the Region 4 Behavioral Health Action Organization, now known as AMPLIFY. As an organization committed to the health and well being of individuals with mental illness and substance abuse disorders, as well as advocates for the delivery and promotion of PREVENTION strategies intended to improve health across an individual's lifespan, we urge you to pass HB 5020.

I feel confident that I am speaking in behalf of the numerous local prevention councils, youth advocates and concerned parents in the Amplify region, who believe that the State of Connecticut must do everything in its power to reduce youth initiation of vaping by restricting sales, increasing the fines associated with sales to minors and eliminating the appealing and attractive flavorings, but hope you will extend that ban to include all tobacco products, such as mango or peach flavored skinny cigars (AKA Cigarillos) which are especially appealing to urban minority youth.

Adults who are serious about quitting smoking have numerous FDA approved medications and therapeutic approaches to quitting that do not rely on a lifetime dependence on nicotine ingested via the hundreds of electronic nicotine delivery devices currently on the market. Adults and youth especially those with diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health disorders or other addictions are most vulnerable to the misleading effects of nicotine. They deserve your protection from the known and unknown consequences of vaping to include the financial burden that accompanies a lifelong addiction to nicotine.

On a personal note I have witnessed the powerful hold nicotine has on a person while facilitating individual and group cessation programs spanning over 35 years, beginning when Merrill Dow Pharmaceuticals introduced a hospital based program called SMOKEWISE to accompany the first offering of nicotine gum as a cessation medication. They knew that smoking cessation required a comprehensive approach, modifying the body's absorption of nicotine in a safe and gradually diminishing formulation, thus lowering the intensity of nicotine withdrawal symptoms , WHILE also providing guidance and support directed at eliminating the habitual and behavioral aspects of the smoking ritual. Companies like JUUL have deliberately created a system that provides high doses of nicotine and replicate the ritualistic aspect of smoking, masking it as a safe alternative. Nicotine, in and of itself does not relieve stress as perceived by most who smoke or vape. Nicotine effects an individual's mood by releasing dopamine, which feels pleasurable; the calming effects related to the ritual of smoking or vaping adds to that, providing the sense of stress release. To maintain that pleasurable state of mind, one must repeat that behavior over and over, thus becoming a lifetime consumer of the very product we speak about. Hundreds of thousands of people have died from the effects of tobacco use, spending money better spent on food, gas and housing, with some chasing the effects of nicotine until the day they died, despite some suffering from debilitating illnesses for years prior.

We cannot begin to calculate the future death toll associated with vaping and or the cost of related medical illnesses, but we can assume there will be consequences, social, emotional, physical and without a doubt financial both to the individual and to those financing related health care. There is no doubt that the age old adage clearly applies here, that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure"!

Thank you for your time and good luck with your deliberations.

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