

**TESTIMONY OF NICHOLAS RICCIARDI**  
**HB 5020**

Good afternoon Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Somers, Representative Petit. My name is Nicholas Ricciardi, I am a proud owner of Vape only stores in CT, an employer of 10 people and I am here to oppose House Bill 5020.

Over the course of the past 7 years I have been actively involved in all aspects concerning vapor regulation within the state of CT. I have testified in favor of several proposals, such as raising the age to purchase vapor products first to 18 years old, and then again in favor of raising the age to 21 last year. I agree with all of you and believe vapor products should not be in the hands of minors. The T21 bill which passed last year and went into effect less than 6 months ago assures this will be the case. The bill proposed today in which flavors are banned will do nothing to further this cause. Ninety percent of adult vapors in the state of CT use these flavors to quit smoking combustible cigarettes which have been proven to be 97 percent more harmful than vaping. I urge the committee to allow the laws that went into effect less than 6 months ago in CT and also the Federal laws that have banned flavored pods which have been proven to be the main culprit in underage kids beginning to vape to take effect before overreaching and enacting a flavor ban which will hurt the progress we have made in getting adults to stop smoking combustible cigarettes.

In my stores alone since opening in 2013, I have seen more than 10,000 customers switch from traditional cigarettes to vaping using several different flavors. I keep hearing people say “vapor stores are trying to market to children because they have flavors like gummy bears and cheesecake”. To that I say, I, Nicholas Ricciardi, a 40-year-old adult, love gummy bears and cheesecake! And I’m sure several members of this committee also enjoy delicious flavors of candy and desserts on occasion. To think only children enjoy delicious things is just wrong. Adults use these flavors in order to get as far away from the taste of traditional cigarettes as possible which is one of the most important factors in quitting smoking.

I have been on a mission to educate elected officials on the different aspects of vaping for the last 7 years. I believe most of you now understand the difference between open system devices that brick and mortar vapor stores like mine and the 40 or so store owners that I am here representing sell, and the closed pod systems which arrived on the market a few years ago and took over online and in all convenience stores and gas stations around the country. The federal government has banned the sale of the flavored closed pods because they did the research and correctly determined that closed pods were what the kids were vaping.

I urge this Committee to also do the proper research before enacting an overall flavor ban which will be devastating to adults. I realize this issue is an easy one to jump on board with because they don’t know the difference between the 2 vaping systems and which one the kids are using. However, this Committee I believe does know the difference and I also believe you will do the right thing in allowing not only our business to stay open but allowing adult vapors to continue their quest to be smoke free.

Thank you and I’m happy to answer any questions you have.