

From: Garcia Tobacco <garciatobacco@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, August 26, 2020 9:27 AM

To: Faith Brown <FBrown@leg.state.vt.us>

Subject: [External] S.288 Testimony / Data / Feedback - Garcia's Tobacco Shop, Burlington Vermont

[External]

Hello, I hope you're having a great day. My name is Robert and I have been with Garcia's Tobacco Shop for 10 years. I would like to share some information about how drastically a flavor ban like S.288 would affect our local and family owned business. I appreciate you taking the time to look over our statement.

We are located at 97 Church Street in Burlington Vermont. Because of our location, we have a very large range of customers. It includes the entire 21+ to senior age range, local people shopping, local employees, tourists from all over the country, Canada, and the rest of the world. We have a highly specialized staff who have been trained on all state / federal laws as well as knowledge related to the products we sell. We are the front lines for preventing youth access and we should be sure we don't turn flavors over to the illegal / DIY market. We have run a responsible, adult oriented business for decades, and what you propose could effectively end that by handing over control to illegal, unregulated markets.

Here's are some important bullet points including relevant data:

- Since July 1st of 2019 (including the slow COVID months), Garcia's Tobacco Shop has generated over \$164,000 in vape tax and over \$51,000 in vape related sales tax. This doesn't even include the tax and revenue generated by flavored shisha, pipe tobacco, cigars etc - You would essentially be cutting the state off from around a half million dollars in tax revenue per year from just *one* location.
- We have been in business for over 30 years. Our business is run responsibly and professionally.
- We currently employ 9 Vermonters and have starting wages set dollars above the state minimum.
- We are located in downtown Burlington and have had over 80,000 transactions since July 2019. These are 80,000 people who have also shopped at other stores downtown, purchased meals, coffee, clothes, etc.
- We have always taken every step to ensure we are only serving adults who are above the legal age limit for tobacco products.
- All lung illnesses related to vaping have been tied to illegal products with harmful ingredients like vitamin E acetate - not what is sold in retail establishments.
- The 21+ law will help reduce access to vape products in schools - for example a 15 year old is more likely to be friends with an 18 year old than a 21 year old. Lets see if this makes a difference before punishing responsible adults who have switched from cigarettes and punishing responsible local business owners who have always followed the rules.
- Banning products creates an illegal market with no oversight or regulation.
- Vaping regulated products have been shown by many scientists and doctors to be less carcinogenic and less harmful than cigarettes. If public health and harm reduction are our main concerns, we should avoid pushing people back towards tobacco and avoid creating an illegal market full of unregulated products.

- Alcohol is a contributing factor to many car accidents, murders, assaults, rapes, etc. These are extreme issues, but they were worse when alcohol was prohibited and was controlled by an illegal market. Keep in mind that it is now perfectly acceptable for an adult to consume a flavored alcoholic beverage or a mixed drink despite the fact that alcohol can be tied to so many horrible things. Nicotine doesn't have the same effect at all, yet we are considering regulating it more harshly?
- Keep vape sales under the control of responsible retailers and specialty stores - this will be much more effective than allowing products to exchange hands without any oversight or regulation.
- Do not punish responsible family owned businesses. We are helping the state through tax revenue and keeping products out of the hands of underage citizens. A flavor ban could put us out of business, create an illegal market full of unregulated products, and negatively impact the health of people who chose to consume nicotine.
- Did alcohol prohibition make alcohol disappear? No. Did cannabis prohibition make cannabis disappear? No. Banning vape flavors will just create an illegal "do it yourself" market with no quality assurance, no I.D. checks, and no tax revenue.

Thank you for taking the time to read my email and consider how a flavor ban would affect our business. Please reach out if you need any clarification or have any questions.

Talk to you soon,

Robert Ronci
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