

To the House Committee on Human Services,

My name is Sam Hartnett, a current UVM student and Vermont resident who moved to Montpelier at age 16. I am writing to you today to express my support for S.18 and the banning of flavored tobacco products.

I began using vapes when I was only 13 years old, and still vape today. I can confidently say that without the wide variety of flavored vapes, (such as those found in Juul or the thousands of disposable flavored vapes available in Vermont) I would not be vaping today. I would be much more inclined to curtail my nicotine use and use alternatives such as nicotine gum or patches, as almost all youth in Vermont are aware of the risks of combustible cigarettes and negative aspects of use. Vaping flavored nicotine provides a much more youth friendly experience, getting kids hooked on nicotine without ever even having smoked a cigarette. Almost all of the people my age who use nicotine that I know started with vaping, often in middle or high school, and almost always below the age of 21.

When the federal ban on flavored pod-based vapes went into effect, it created a market for disposable flavored vapes that are even more attractive to youth. Disposable vapes today come in a wide variety of colors and flavors, along with features and accessories like battery power displays or lanyards. The ban in 2022 that caused Juul to pull their fruit or dessert flavored pods from the market was not comprehensive enough to effectively curtail youth nicotine use, as we now see gas stations selling a wide variety of disposable flavored vapes that often end up discarded in the street or landfills after they are used up.

To address the point that banning flavored products will negatively impact adult smokers, I would claim that these products are not intended to help adults curtail smoking use. They often contain chemicals, such as menthol or benzoic acid, that increase the likelihood of addiction by allowing for a smoother smoking experience and deeper inhalation. These products do not help curtail nicotine use; they only get adult smokers addicted to vaping, and most importantly, get kids hooked on nicotine for the first time. While big tobacco defenders claim that vaping is 95% less harmful than smoking, we have yet to understand the full effects of vaping for a prolonged period of time. Vapes have only been around since the early 2000s, and it is important that we do more research to understand the health effects vaping truly has over time, and not just in the short term. Additionally, Vermont spends millions on tobacco related health issues, and the loss in tax revenue from sales will pale in comparison to the money saved on healthcare, and especially the invaluable lives of youth in Vermont today.

I have much more to say on this topic; I have lived as a minor through the beginning of the vaping epidemic to the point we have arrived at today. I have seen myself and friends be targeted by big tobacco as their next generation of

customers, and I believe my testimony would provide value to the committee, and I hope to share my story with you.

Sam Hartnett
Burlington, VT