

My name is Diane Kirson-Glitman and I am a resident of Jericho, a pediatric nurse and a school board member. Currently, I am a school nurse at Essex High School in Essex Junction, Vermont. I am an active member of both the Vermont State School Nurses Association and Vermont School Boards Association.

I am not here to give you facts and statistics. I think everyone is aware that just at the time we had really made a dent in the major health issue of tobacco use, Juul and vaping came on the scene and it feels like we are starting over again with nicotine addiction. I do want to speak to what I am seeing as a school nurse now and thoughts on what has worked in the past to change the health behaviors of our teens.

First, I want to say I am in support of S.18 and urge this committee to vote in favor and move forward with the bill. Daily, we deal with vaping in our schools. When Bernie Sanders came to Essex High School last year for a town hall meeting with the students, he asked specifically about vaping. He asked who had either vaped or knew someone who had and just about the entire auditorium of students raised their hands. All of us present heard first hand how prevalent vaping had become and students articulated that they had started or tried vaping due to the flavors. Some students also expressed that it was sad to see their peers become addicted and it was their recommendation, specifically, that flavors should be eliminated.

I am concerned that what we are seeing in schools is that the students with the least family support and least resources become the most frequent users or addicts. For some, vaping was occurring in their homes already. It is disheartening to see generational addiction, not unlike generational poverty, return after we had done fairly well in the fight against tobacco.

S. 18 may not be the magic bullet to solve the issue but it is a tool we should use and should have used sooner to help our youth. The health threats of tobacco and obesity were successfully addressed with a multipronged approach of education, legislation and taxation. We need these approaches with all nicotine products now. Education around all nicotine and vaping is already in place in our schools but until we can limit access, make the use of nicotine more difficult, unpleasant and uncool, our young students are at the greatest risk. Schools are already working hard at this and need your help.

The arguments to keep flavored nicotine products available do not impress me in light of the serious need to curb use by youth of these products. If those arguments are the same ones we heard with Tobacco 21 and Sugary Beverages Taxes; choice and financial hit to small stores, my observation is that adults and stores adapted to the changes.

We still have no long term studies on the effects of all of the components of vape liquid or the variable doses of nicotine found in the liquids and in the nicotine pouches like Zyn. We should be especially concerned about the effects on the brains and bodies of adolescents.

From my observations, we need to make the right choice, the easy choice. Flavored nicotine products and flavored tobacco including menthol make the wrong choice easier. Eliminating flavors from all nicotine products is another move we should make in our battle to keep our children safe and healthy.