

Karen Meyer
S.18

January 31, 2024

My son is addicted to vaping. He started when friends introduced him to a flavored vape product in high school when he was 17 and is now struggling to quit at 24. He's part of Vermont's youth tobacco addiction crisis that demands action -- on two fronts.

We can immediately remove the enticement for these products to youth by eliminating the sale of flavored tobacco. It's ridiculous to think that flavors like Sour Patch, Fluffer Nutter and Gummy Chews are geared to adults. They are marketed to kids and it's working. A quarter of Vermont's high schools seniors are vaping, and the problem has now seeped into middle schools.

When my son started, each JUUL pod provided 500 puffs, the equivalent to a pack of cigarettes. Now, there are products on the market, in the same flavors and colors as taffy, that deliver 4,000 puffs per product. These disposable vapes are now hip for kids with many calling them "dispos." Tobacco shouldn't be appealing. It shouldn't be hip. It shouldn't be flavored. These nicotine laden pacifiers are wrecking our kids' lives.

It's a myth that these products are safe. My son was literally in DTs [Delirium Tremens, a severe withdrawal symptom] when we went on a family vacation to look at colleges in California. He had physical withdrawal symptoms from the lack of nicotine his body was craving. Which brings me to my second request.

Vermont legislators should pass S.18 which would prevent the sale of flavored products to prevent kids from getting hooked in the first place. But they also need to do more to help students like my son who are addicted.

Even in high school he said to us, "I shouldn't be doing this, but I can't stop." We wanted help for him, but never got it. Instead, he was punished for his addiction time and time again. He was let go from the National Honor Society, suspended from baseball; received no support, no counseling. To determine whether punishing kids for their addiction works, you only have to look at my son. Still vaping, seven years later. Taking away the things kids enjoy and removing them from school does not prevent addiction, rather, it likely makes it worse.

I urge Vermont legislators to act quickly this year to finally pass this legislation. This issue has been before the legislature for many years. In the meantime, more and more Vermont kids have become addicted. And lawmakers need to do a thorough job. Prevent the sale of ALL flavored tobacco products. Remove menthol cigarette sales as well. We know kids will jump to whatever appealing product is available. And get kids the help they need to quit. Put funding into the Tobacco Control Program that is directed at kids, both prevention and treatment.

Vermont kids need this help. They are worth every cent we put into this effort.

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