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Brattleboro, VT 05301

Vermont House Committee on Ways and Means State House 115 State Street Montpelier, VT 05633

Subject: Opposition to S. 18 - Ban on Flavored Tobacco and Nicotine Products

Dear Members of the Vermont House Committee on Ways and Means,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 18, which proposes a ban on flavored tobacco products in Vermont. While I understand the concerns surrounding the use of these products, I believe that prohibition is not the most effective approach. This bill will have significant negative consequences for Vermonters, the state's economy, and the small business community. I own a store in Brattleboro that's just minutes to New Hampshire. I am concerned that this bill will simply send my adult customers to New Hampshire to purchase their preferred brand and other products they may purchase in my store. I have four employees that I employ at my business and I am concerned that I will have to let all of them go if this passes because I cannot afford to keep them with the revenue loss. I urge you to reconsider this proposed legislation for the following reasons:

Prohibition is not the solution. History has shown that prohibition rarely achieves its intended goals. Banning flavored tobacco products will not eliminate their use but will instead drive consumers towards the black market, where unregulated and potentially dangerous products may become more prevalent. I have personal experience with this as I used to have a convenience store in Springfield, Massachusetts. After the ban occurred, I had to shut the business down and terminate the five employees that I had in my store. I should note that Springfield is on the border of Connecticut. My business in Brattleboro is a very similar distance to New Hampshire as my business in Springfield was to Connecticut.

Not only will this impact small businesses like mine, but this will impact the state as a whole. The proposed ban will result in a substantial loss of tax revenue for the state – an estimated at \$16 million. Flavored tobacco products contribute significantly to the state's tax base, generating tens of millions of dollars annually. This loss of revenue will have a direct impact on funding for essential public services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

It is important to note that tobacco and nicotine products are already illegal for individuals under the age of 21 in Vermont. The state has taken significant steps to address youth access to these products. Instead of implementing a complete ban, efforts should be focused on enforcing existing age restrictions and enhancing educational campaigns to discourage underage tobacco use. The outcome will not impact youth usage, but only create unintended consequences and anger adults that choose to use these products.

In conclusion, from a small business perspective, I strongly urge you to reconsider Senate Bill 18 and its proposed ban on flavored tobacco products. Prohibition is not the answer, and the negative consequences of this legislation will far outweigh any potential benefits. I encourage you to explore alternative approaches that prioritize education and enforcement

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust that you will carefully consider the points raised in this letter and make an informed decision that best serves the interests of Vermont and its residents.

Sincerely,

Mohamed Sajan

Sunoco Gas Station

Smoke and Munch