

My name is Ann Atkins and I am a native Vermonter who has smoked for 30+ years.

I am writing to you in regards to the S18 Bill. When Vape products first came out, I honestly didn't have a lot of interest in them. But the more I saw and heard about them is when I decided to educate myself. I am now a vape user. It was the best choice I've made... I feel better, I have more energy and that nagging smokers cough is gone. I know it's not a healthy option but it's a more healthy option (for me) than was a regular cigarette. Of course the flavors are attractive, but so many things that are bad for us now come in a variety of flavors. Ice cream, coffee creamers, Liquor (but I know we cannot talk about that!)... flavors are attracting and it's just a part of this world!

Now the Bill. I work as a buyer in a Vermont Family owned Wholesale company. Years ago we started off with just a few Vape products and have built the inventory up to amazing levels. Is it because of the flavors? Possibly. But I think it's more for the idea of a safer alternative to regular cigarettes. When Vape first came out, my TV screen, the radio, was over run by the dangers of vaping... where did all those ads go? My guess is that the research no longer supports those ads!

This Bill is just another step in to losing our rights, as Vermonters to chose. Our rights are continually challenged. Our freedom of choice is no longer. Soon we will be told on what day we can get groceries, or at what store we can shop. What clothes we wear on what day! Which brings up another issue. If this Bill passes, the hundreds of thousands of Vape users will go elsewhere. I know I will... and I will take along my grocery list, household items list and heck, might as well fill up the gas tank also. Just like the people from New York and Massachusetts are doing.

Job security is probably the most important thing to touch on. My employer is now able to give regular raises and the health care benefits are amazing. For a small family owned company, they are currently taking care of 80% of our health insurance. If we lose the sales of Vape and other flavored items, I am afraid their contributions will decrease and my portion will increase. With the economy the way it is, who can afford any loss in their paycheck. I know this is something none of you have to worry about, but your working class goes to bed every night worrying!

In 2022, our company has paid the State of Vermont 14 million dollars in Tobacco tax, 8 million dollars in which came from flavored products! This doesn't include the 6% tax from the retailers. We currently stock over 800 flavored products and you pulling them from us will not only hurt our business, but will most definitely shut the doors on our local "Vermont" businesses. Maybe take a portion of this tax revenue and put it into educating the youth as this seems to be where the concern is. I always say "if you want something bad enough, you will get it". So targeting the youth is just an excuse for the State to try and gain more control over us.

In closing, if you pass this Bill, you will not only see small businesses close their doors you will see unemployment numbers rise. This will all be on you! The people who are suppose to protect our rights and do right by us!

Ann Atkins