

Hibbert McGee

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My name is Emily Atkins and I'm a 3rd generation owner of Hibbert & McGee Wholesalers in Barre, VT. We are a small family owned and operated business catering to central Vermont.

As someone that has been in the tobacco business, I believe the S-18 flavor ban is the wrong decision for Vermont.

I grew up in Barre, where my grandparents acquired Hibbert & McGee Wholesalers in 1956. The company began by selling cigarettes out of a little cab over truck. Because of their success, they were able to invest in the company and add two additional buildings, expand product lines and create a business that employs 45. Today, Hibbert & McGee Wholesalers is thriving and growing the business in Vermont.

Our company offers thousands of products including candy, grocery, health and beauty, foodservice supplies, deli meats and cheese, as well as tobacco products. Of these tobacco products, over 70% of them, by bill definition, are flavored tobacco products. Proponents of this bill focus on e-cigarettes and e-vapor, but this bill, as currently written, overreaches and prohibits other tobacco products like menthol cigarettes, wintergreen dip, and flavored pipe tobacco. In 2022, Hibbert & McGee Wholesalers paid the State of Vermont \$14.5 million in tobacco excise taxes, **\$7.9 million** just on flavored products alone. Additionally, these figures do not include sales tax that is collected by the retailer. If this ban were to pass, our company will be forced to eliminate jobs just to stay in business. At Hibbert & McGee, we care about our retailers and have always put them first. Not only am I concerned about our business, but the hundreds of retailers across the state of VT as well as their employees.

Massachusetts recently passed the same legislation which in turn forced menthol smokers, flavored vape users, and flavored chew customers to cross the borders into Vermont and New Hampshire. Two weeks ago, the Boston Herald reported that the Massachusetts lost \$120 million just in excise taxes alone since 2020

[\(https://www.bostonherald.com/2023/03/06/smuggled-smokes-seizure-of-illegal-tobacco-jumps-in-massachusetts-according-to-report/\)](https://www.bostonherald.com/2023/03/06/smuggled-smokes-seizure-of-illegal-tobacco-jumps-in-massachusetts-according-to-report/)

Established in 1956



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Adult tobacco consumers are going to find their preferred product by going out of state or purchasing it on the black market. They are also going to buy their gas, alcohol, and other market basket purchases while they are there. The precedent has already been set by Massachusetts – don't let this happen in Vermont.

From a personal standpoint, my mother was a long-time pack-a-day+ cigarette smoker. On October 1st my mother made the choice to smoke her last cigarette, switching to a flavored vape and hasn't looked back. She feels better, she can breathe lighter and has a lot more energy throughout the day. She has progressed from a 60mg vape and is now using a 30mg vape with the goal to continue to move down in nicotine strength. As her child, I feel much better knowing she is not consuming a combustible cigarette into her lungs. E-vapor was a less harmful option for my mother who said she would never change her ways. I believe there are many others out there just like her. I worry that adult consumers, like my mom, will switch back to combustible cigarettes if their preferred flavor ban is taken away from them.

The Vermont DLC enforcement does an excellent job holding bad actors in the retail community accountable and keeping tobacco products out of the hands of the underaged. All cashiers are required to check IDs to purchase tobacco and alcohol. Retailers are the first line of defense preventing the underaged from obtaining tobacco products. By banning flavors, you'll simply create a black market outside of the Vermont's DLC purview.

My dream is to continue to grow the business of Hibbert & McGee Wholesalers so that my children can carry the torch for another generation. However, if this prohibition on flavors should pass, I'm unsure this Vermont based company will survive another year.

Thank you for time and attention,

Emily Atkins



Established in 1956