

March 20, 2023

To Those Who Sit Beneath the Golden Dome:

My name is Kevin Smith and I am a 43 year old native Vermonter and former smoker of menthol cigarettes. My job in sales takes me in and out of local stores all day. I pay attention to what customers and patrons say, what they do and what is currently on trend — which is how I began hearing about vape products, but dismissed them as just another form of nicotine. However, as the popularity of vaping grew, I began to pay attention to the types of consumers who were purchasing these products. Yes, we've all heard that vaping is a "kid thing," but to my surprise, the demographic I most often see buying these items are the 40, 50 and 60 year old lifetime cigarette smokers!

So I wanted to know more. And from the many studies I read I learned that while vaping is still not healthy, it is considered to be 90% safer than smoking cigarettes. So I made the switch from menthol cigarettes to e-cigarettes and I'm so glad I did! I tried the plain tobacco flavors at first and didn't like them, but I found that I did like a handful of the flavors available to me. Over time I used it less and less — I didn't need to pick it up as soon as I woke up in the morning, I didn't need to have it with my cup of coffee, I didn't need to have it immediately after a meal. While I realize that e-cigs are not intended for smoking cessation, in my case they helped me beat the physical addiction of lighting up whenever I had the chance to, which is what I needed to finally stop altogether! And guess what? So did all my friends after seeing my results, and our families couldn't be more proud of us.

S-18 is a terrible idea. Not only will it remove a safer alternative in a step away from combustible cigarettes, but it will place additional burden on taxpayers when this revenue is lost — as much as three times more than what is being reported. Because, "...in this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes." In a state that wants its employers to provide benefits and higher salaries for their workers — a state that puts such a great emphasis on its shop local ethos — how will a mom and pop store do so when legislation continuously drives business and tax revenue away?

Listen, I'm not stupid. I know most of you think that this bill will somehow stop underage tobacco use, but that's laughable. Don't you remember being young? There will always be an avenue to get whatever they want and this won't change it. In speaking with high school aged family members, I was told that not many of their peers vaped, but for those that did, this bill would not be pose a significant obstacle in getting more. From what I've seen the stores are still doing a wonderful job of not selling to minors. This bill will do nothing to curb underage use but will penalize a huge group of adult tobacco users by not giving them safer alternatives and choices. Perhaps the penalties for underage possession should be more severe instead of taking away millions of dollars from businesses that are selling legal products (when we just made a federally illegal product legal in Vermont). When I've been told by retailers that cigarette sales have been cut in half and safer choices are now leading the way, I have to wonder why anyone would think that this is a step forward when it's clearly two steps back — especially when considering what the scope of this bill will really mean to Vermont businesses, employees, and families. Not only is your anticipated lost revenue woefully inadequate, but so to will be the effect on the Vermonters you claim to want to help.

I sincerely hope you protect the choices we all deserve,

Kevin Smith

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'K' and 'S'.

