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My name is Matt Meunier. I'm a Student Assistance Program counselor at CVU, and I also serve as a college baseball coach at Saint Michael's College. In my role, I work every day with students and families navigating substance use, mental health, and the realities of growing up right now.

I appreciate the work that has gone into this bill and want to speak specifically to the consumer protection aspects, particularly deceptive products and the retail environment, and how they show up in schools.

What I'm seeing daily is that the nicotine landscape for young people has changed dramatically. Students are not using traditional tobacco products. They are using vapes, nicotine pouches, and products that are designed to look like something else entirely (school supplies, tech devices, even everyday items).

This bill's language around deceptive products is critical. The reality is that many of the products students are using are intentionally designed to conceal their purpose and appeal to young people. This could be through flavors, packaging, or by mimicking items they carry every day.

From a school perspective, that creates a real challenge. We are not just addressing use. We are trying to identify products that are built to avoid detection. This puts students at greater risk and makes prevention significantly more difficult.

I also want to speak to the retail and access side, because that is where I believe this bill can have the greatest impact.

I worked with a family whose son was struggling with nicotine use. His parents were incredibly engaged. Over the course of more than a year, they contacted online retailers, blocked deliveries, and worked closely with the school to try to cut off access. They even tried to identify where he was getting products locally.

Despite all of that, he was still able to consistently access nicotine.

That experience is not unique. It reflects what I see regularly—families doing everything right, while access continues to exist.

From my perspective, youth nicotine use is not a possession problem—it is an access problem.

When products are this available, and in many cases designed to appeal to or evade detection by youth, we cannot expect behavior to change by focusing on the young person alone.

I also want to briefly acknowledge the removal of penalties for youth possession. In my work, punitive responses often create more barriers than solutions. Students become less likely to be honest and less likely to seek help. When we reduce that fear, we create more opportunities for early intervention, which is where we can actually make a difference.

Finally, I would just add this:

The more we can strengthen the retail environment, through consistent compliance, clear expectations, and meaningful accountability, the more we support families, schools, and communities who are already working hard to address this issue.

Passing this bill moves us closer to aligning policy with what we are seeing on the ground every day.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and your commitment to supporting Vermont's youth. I'm happy to answer any questions.