

Dear Senate Finance Committee members,

I appreciate the work you are doing on Senate bill 198 to strengthen the regulation of nicotine products to protect Vermont kids from today's products that are increasingly designed to appeal to young people to get them using earlier. I work in the substance misuse prevention field and am a mother of two young adults in Essex Junction. For both reasons the laws and regulations in VT for nicotine and tobacco are very important to me, and I believe that health and wellbeing, particularly of our kids, should take priority over commercial interests.

PUP laws that put the penalty for nicotine use on a young person are like holding fish responsible for dying in a polluted stream. We don't want kids to be worried about getting help for a nicotine addiction because they fear getting into trouble. We must shift the accountability and penalties to the systems and retailers supplying and targeting addictive products to minors.

One of the things I'm most excited to see happen in this bill is prohibiting the marketing and sale of the nicotine devices that are imitating food, candy, school, supplies, and toys. These deceptive products are helping to fuel the vaping crisis we see in the US and VT and they now come with increasingly high levels of nicotine--helping the tobacco industry to achieve their goal of getting a young person addicted early and quickly to help ensure they have a lifelong customer. My 18 year old son has shared with me that the last couple of years he has seen more and more of his friends starting to use vape products and nicotine pouches - getting sucked in by how accessible and promoted they are in their everyday lives. He has talked frequently about hard and stressful it is to make healthy choices when he sees it all around him.

Vermont currently spends \$404 million to address tobacco-related health care disease, including \$93.7 million in Medicaid costs. By modernizing and equalizing the tobacco retail environment in Vermont, we can prevent youth from ever starting an unwanted addiction to a very expensive and deadly product.

Warmly,  
Mariah Flynn Sanderson