

## Council Members

Today you have an ordinance that I have no doubt was crafted in an effort to protect both citizens and youth of St. Paul from the efforts of Big Tobacco to gain more customers every day. I represent the Independent Vaping Retailers of MN (IVRM) a coalition of businesses that manufacture and sell vaping products. I can assure you that no one has been harmed more by tobacco products than our customers. It is due to the harmful and addictive nature of traditional tobacco products that both our customers and business owners sought out vaping as an alternative.

Our organization has significant concerns about this ordinance despite the fact that it would likely result in greater sales for many of our member businesses. We urge you to base your decision on real science and opposed to fear and speculation.

Our industry is estimated at \$2.6 billion in the U.S. Less than half of that is products made by Big Tobacco. The majority of our industry is made up of small businesses that sell open system devices as opposed to closed system devices sold by Altria, RJ Reynolds Lorillard and others. The majority of flavors used in open system devices would be prohibited and removed from shelves under this proposal. Whereas the majority of products sold by big tobacco would comply and remain on the shelves including of course traditional tobacco products.

Despite the reported increase of use among teens it is unknown how many are using on a regular basis. A recent study by Clearway acknowledged that using the typical 30 day indicator was not indicative of regular use. Even more importantly there is NO evidence that teens who have used these products turn to traditional cigarettes as is often claimed. Not only has the smoking rate continued to drop over the last five years but even the British Government AND leading anti smoking groups in the UK signed letter (attached) debunking this "gateway" myth.

US anti smoking groups have reiterated time and time again that these products do not help with cessation. Yet numerous studies have shown mounting evidence to the contrary. Consider that according to the MN Adult Tobacco Survey conducted by Clearway MN.

- Smoking is at an all time low.

- Successful quit attempts have increased and the most popular method of quitting by far is use of vaping products.

- Over this same period use of other nicotine therapies dropped by 40% and use of counseling dropped by over half.

A recent study, published in Nicotine & Tobacco Research, was conducted by Rutgers School of Public Health and the Schroeder Institute, a national public-health group, show promising results for the use of E cigarettes as cessation method. David Abrams, the institute's executive director, said the study shows e-cigs "could be used to displace use of much more deadly cigarettes among smokers and could generate an impressive public-health benefit in terms of lives saved."

It is time to stop hiding from the truth. People are choosing these products as an alternative to smoking and we should not make that transition more difficult. Every time someone chooses NOT to smoke a cigarette it is good. even if they chose to use an alternative method to get nicotine.

By passing this ordinance you are effectively taking off the shelves the most popular alternative to smoking yet LEAVING the very smokes that WE KNOW are killing people. If passed the number of locations where people can buy these products will be less than five and only ONE will be a vaping only location while another will be forced to close.

There are currently 3 shops in St. Paul that primarily sell vaping products. One does not sell liquid but only devices because they cannot qualify for a license due to their proximity to a Cigar store, although neither shop sells any similar products. Another shop shares space with an adult business and does not allow anyone under the age of 18 but because they do not have 90% of revenue from tobacco they will be forced to remove 95% of their products, thus closing. That will leave only one store remaining that is a vaping only retailer. Two of the businesses that could sell flavored products under this ordinance will not do so because they are cigar focused businesses. For anyone seeking an alternative to tobacco in St. Paul it will not be easy.

### **What we are asking**

**1. Exclude vaping products from the flavor ban. This will give customers a true alternative at their local business.**

**2. Allow any business that limits access only adults to sell flavored products. Though still limiting it will provide greater location options to customers. ( at minimum give the existing business that shares space some time to find a new location)**

**3. Consider allowing vaping specific stores to locate near traditional tobacco businesses.**

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