

My name is Josh Hassing, and I am the Director of Retail Operations and Regulatory Compliance for VR Holdings, which owns the vape companies **Vaping Studio** and **Vermillion River**. Since I took this position, I have seen myself and anyone else who works in this industry essentially labeled as “villainous” on several occasions due to the products we sell. Along with this, any issue, either perceived or real, is solely blamed on us as though we are forcing our products into people’s hands against their will. While I do concede that there are some “bad apples” in the industry, they are few and far between. An overwhelming majority of our industry not only follow all applicable laws regarding the use or sale of vaping products, but some of us have even reached out to legislators in our respective states in an attempt to assist in drafting legislation that would not only protect public health but would also protect the vaping industry from draconian legislation. As a matter of fact, I am one of those people, and have received *some* correspondence regarding this, but most legislators in St. Paul have seemed to ignore my olive branch outright and continue to ignore facts and statistics.

Our stores carry a wide variety of flavors and products for our customers. While there are several customers who prefer traditional tobacco flavors, over 80% of our customers choose a fruit or bakery type flavor. Their reasoning varies, but possibly the most common reason for their choice is that the traditional tobacco flavors don’t equate to a cigarette, and due to this they find themselves returning to cigarettes. These customers have reported that using a sweeter flavor allows them a greater chance of quitting smoking completely.

I have also heard the claim several times in my career that “they’re just replacing one vice for another”. This is completely false on its face. There is a noticeable difference between traditional cigarettes and vaping. With cigarettes, the nicotine levels are set, and cannot be adjusted. In vape liquid, however, the nicotine is able to be tapered down over time. A customer may start vaping with 12mg/mL of nicotine, but over time we have seen many reduce that nicotine level, and eventually quit vaping and nicotine as a whole altogether. Removing the option of flavors for our customers would remove one of the key factors that have allowed so many people to use vaping as a means to successfully defeat their nicotine addiction.

If this bill is allowed to become law, not only would it put thousands of Minnesotans out of work, it wouldn’t even solve the problem that you are claiming it would. Users of these products would simply go online and either purchase vape liquid from an out-of-state company, or they would purchase the ingredients needed to make vape liquid in their own homes. Neither of these options are overly complicated. Where this does become complicated, however, is the fact that some of these websites that sell vape liquid ingredients are less than reputable, and their ingredients would likely cause additional health concerns.

Furthermore, the methods in which these ingredients are mixed in the privacy of someone’s home may fall short of sanitary and could cause even more health problems due to contamination. Those of us in the vaping industry who manufacture vape liquids have strict SOP’s that we follow, and we do this to keep our customers safe. These same SOP’s are not likely to be followed by an individual mixing vape liquid for themselves or for friends. We know what we’re doing, and we know how to do it safely. Best case scenario, you are giving our local revenue to other states. Worst case scenario, you are creating a black-market for vape liquid in Minnesota that will cause another health crisis similar to the vitamin-E acetate found in the black-market THC cartridges we all saw last year.

Also, while I understand that this bill does include penalties for an individual selling or giving flavored liquid to another individual, I fail to see how this could be enforced in any realistic way, and therefore I believe any attempts would be essentially ineffective. I feel the state’s efforts, and the taxpayers’ dollars, would be nothing but wasted trying to enforce this bill. The best route to take would be to allow

reputable manufacturers and retailers continue to sell their flavors in a controlled and monitored environment where safety precautions can be kept in place.

Great Britain and the EU have been conducting studies on the effects of vaping for years, and while they admit it is not 100% safe, they have found it to be “95% less harmful” than traditional tobacco. As a matter of fact, some drug stores in Great Britain no longer keep their vaping products in the tobacco section and have actually moved them to the “health and wellness” section along with other “quit smoking aids” and also with nutritional supplements. Please explain to me why we seem to be the only developed country in the world that continues to ignore well-documented science around vaping.

In conclusion, I am asking this committee to vote “no” on this bill. Along with this, however, I am personally inviting each member of this committee to meet with me in person, over Zoom, or via any other means and discuss their rationale for supporting this bill. I would also like to discuss the possibility of abandoning this bill and working with me on legislation regarding vaping that I honestly believe would make a difference in our public health. I have extended this invitation to several legislators several times (including to members of this committee), and I have honestly been beyond disappointed at the lack of interest, and I see no signs of this changing.... Prove me wrong this time.

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