

Kelly Willigar

Ld 1215, Ld 1174

Dear Senators and Representatives of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Kelly Willigar and I am the owner/operator of Vapor City in Raymond, Maine. I have testified many, many times over the years regarding this subject. I struggle to think of another profession where my livelihood and convictions would be so challenged on a regular basis. Each time I have testified, I have done so with less confidence that my words will be heard, that this time what I have to say will make a difference.

In the early days of testimony, I have shared our "origin" story. How my father smoke for over 50 years and was headed down the road towards severe complications, such as Emphysema. He was getting Bronchitis chronically and having trouble breathing, on a regular basis. Christmas Day, 14 years ago he received his electronic vaporizer and our lives changed, he never smoked a cigarette again. He tried everything, over the years, but this was the only thing that worked. He hasn't had Bronchitis or breathing problems, since and uses his vaporizer faithfully. We opened our flagship store a few years later to provide others people plagued by nicotine addiction with the same success.

I have expanded on this "origin" story by telling the stories of my thousands of customers. While our industry has struggled to stay afloat due to constant flavor ban legislation and over taxation, we have continued to provide education and safe, age appropriate, nicotine alternatives to an underserved, neglected community of people who are desperate for relief. I have served a gentleman, fresh out of heart surgery who was told he would die if he kept smoking. He used vaporizers for a few years before quitting and going on with his life, I'll never forget the bandage that covered his body from neck to navel. I have served pregnant woman who are desperate to not smoke for their babies (my favorite part is when they bring those beautiful babies back to the shop, so I can kiss their blessed cheeks). I have served asthmatics, sent by their respiratory therapists, old men and woman with cancer, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, addicts, loved ones brought in by the hand, and sceptics who think it can't possibly work for them. I see every walk of life, every type of person but they all have one thing in common. They have an addiction and have no where to go because they have been failed by the very people supposed to help them.

I have testified with medical studies galore, annoying some of your very wonderful clerk staff with page after page of medical studies with big words and medical jargon that boggles the mind. I have spent hundreds of dollars copying then UK's policies and procedure regarding their support for Vaping and their plan to use it to create a smoke free England. I thought that the College of Physicians was one of the most respected medial authorities in the world, until a medical doctor on the Health and Human Services committee refused to even look at all my hard work stating "no medical studies have ever been done" while refusing to look at my 200 pages of medical studies. Even our own CDC has now published studies that, while still hedging their bets on out right saying anything positive about vaping products, have shown that it is effective at helping people quit smoking, for good, and has much less negative effect on our bodies!

In past testimonies, I have spent hours pouring over surveys and reports regarding youth behavior as it relates to vaping and other age restricted products. I have made charts, handouts, fact sheets and bid displays showing how minute the youth vaping “epidemic” is compared to ALL other age restricted products such as Marijuana and alcohol. In 2020 less than 10% of youth used E cig products but 55% used alcohol on a regular basis and 43% marijuana. Yet, we open new breweries and marijuana shops, everyday in the state of Maine. Alcohol and marijuana can be delivered to your home and there are gummy bears with thc and lucky charms beer. Am I really the only person who can see the irony in all of this? I didn’t dare to think that my state Senator and representatives could look past all this and possibly pass a flavor ban or propose another one. Surely the people whom I vote for, pay for, support, my customers vote for, pay for and support will see the hypocrisy in all of this? Yet, here I sit, at my computer, again.

The last time I testified, I sat through hours upon hours listening to testimony that stated that the only thing that was important is that kids vape and they vape because of flavors. While I’m very sure that kids smoked before vape, drink anything, and smoke marijuana in any flavor, I also know that the youth will always get access to things they aren’t supposed to, use products they shouldn’t and continue to make all around bad decisions. That being said all they hype around youth access has severely obscured the real issue of adults who need to quit combustible products. Who is representing them? Who is standing up for their rights?

So, as I sit and try and figure out a way to conclude another testimony to save my business and support my community, I wonder if anyone has read these words? I wonder if anyone has seen past all the politics and money and seen the people, I see every day? I wonder how many times someone will ask the folks rooting for a flavor ban who pays their salary and testimonies? I wonder if anyone will see my words and it will actually make a difference this time?

I, respectfully, ask you to not ban flavored products and punish the adults for the actions of a few, misguided, youth.