

Penobscot Nation



Youth Council

April 25, 2023

The Penobscot Nation Youth Council came together to share our voice about commercial tobacco prevention focusing on flavored tobacco products that aim to hook kids. Jayden Love and Eben Francis testified on LD 1550: An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products on May 7, 2021. Here are pieces of our testimonies:

“Our Traditional tobacco has been used by Penobscot’s and Indigenous people since time immemorial as a medicine with cultural and spiritual importance. But traditional tobacco has been tainted by the tobacco industry. Chemicals are poured into the tobacco to make it more addicting and flavorful.”

“In today’s world Nicotine and tobacco products are everywhere. According to truthinitiative.org 16.1% of American Indian and Alaska Native middle schoolers use e-cigarettes. As if that statistic wasn’t large enough 40.4% of American Indian and Alaska native high school students use e-cigarettes.”

As teens and young adults of the Penobscot Nation, we’ve grown up learning tobacco is used as a way to give thanks. It hurts to see something of cultural significance being used to exploit other young people, like ourselves. We see our peers, as young as 13, using commercial tobacco products such as e-cigarettes. Commercial tobacco companies use enticing flavors and fun names in e-cigarettes to attract and hook kids. This is scary for many reasons: the likelihood of nicotine addiction, the risks of nicotine on the adolescent brain and body, and the many other unknown health affects around using commercial tobacco products.

Many teens use e-cigarettes without knowing there is nicotine even in it, adding to the growing popularity of use in teen culture. Some of us can recall when vape products hit the market and it seemed like every high schooler had one in their hand. Bathrooms were referred to as the “vape room” or “Juul room”. As more flavors hit the market like mint, cucumber, mango, and many more—these flavors became more appealing to youth. Big commercial tobacco companies continue to target youth with flavors, new products, appealing advertising, fancy packaging and smoke shops that look like candy shops from the outside.

The health and wellbeing of the next seven generations is our future, but flavored tobacco products are luring and hooking another generation. It’s time to end the sale of flavored tobacco, keep tobacco sacred. Our voices need to be heard.

Woliwon,
Penobscot Nation Youth Council