

January 13, 2020

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative:

On behalf of teachers, principals, school superintendents, school boards, and other educators, we write to express our strong support for The Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act, (HR 2339) that would prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products, including flavored e-cigarettes. Youth e-cigarette use is a public health crisis and it is being fueled by flavored e-cigarettes. Tobacco companies are marketing products to our children and students in a wide array of flavors and risking the decades of progress the nation has made in reducing youth tobacco use. By curbing the use of flavors, we can reverse the youth e-cigarette epidemic and protect our kids from a lifetime of nicotine addiction.

As educators, we are seeing the impact of the youth e-cigarette epidemic every day. While educators are doing all that is within their power to prevent it, our students are using these products throughout the school day in bathrooms, classrooms, and elsewhere on school grounds. Schools are struggling to address this crisis and are dedicating significant resources towards prevention and education about the harms of nicotine use, technology to prevent use of the products in school and resources to assist students in quitting. The youth e-cigarette epidemic has placed an incredible burden on educators, with significant resources and instructional time lost in attempts to prevent e-cigarette use.

The latest national data reflects what we are seeing every day. From 2017 to 2019, current e-cigarette use more than doubled among high school students (from 11.7% to 27.5%). One in four high school students now use e-cigarettes. Among middle school students, e-cigarette use tripled from 2017 to 2019, from 3.3% to 10.5%. An alarming 5.3 million middle and high school students are now current e-cigarette users.

Flavors are a key contributor to the rise in e-cigarette use by our students. Flavored tobacco products appeal to young people and are easier for them to use, as they change the taste and mask the harshness of tobacco products. Ninety-seven percent of current youth e-cigarette users have used a flavor product in the past month, and seven out of ten said they used the products “because they come in flavors I like.” Of high school students that use e-cigarettes, 65.9% use fruit-flavored e-cigarettes and 57.3% use mint or menthol e-cigarettes. In our schools, flavored products are the most popular e-cigarettes used by students.

The Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act would place necessary restrictions on flavors that would dramatically reduce the use of tobacco products by our students. This bill also includes other strong provisions such as prohibiting online sales of tobacco products and

extending advertising restrictions that currently apply to cigarettes and smokeless tobacco to other tobacco products, including e-cigarettes.

As educators we are incredibly concerned about the impact e-cigarettes use is having on our students. While we recognize the Administration has taken small steps to address this epidemic, stronger action must be taken by Congress to step in and aid schools in curbing the use of these products. Prohibiting tobacco products in kid-friendly flavors and ending marketing practices that target our youth are some of the most important actions Congress can take to reverse the youth e-cigarette epidemic and continue reducing youth tobacco use. We urge you to co-sponsor the Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act and protect our kids.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Sasha Pudelski at AASA at spudelski@aasa.org.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
American School Counselor Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Education Association
National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
SHAPE America