



March 17, 2023

Attn: Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Nelson and Goodwein, and House Committee On Behavioral Health and Health Care

Re: HB 3090

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice-Chairs Nelson and Goodwein, and Committee Members,

On behalf of Washington County Department of Health and Human Services, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to offer comment in strong support of House Bill 3090, which would prohibit the sale and/or distribution of flavored tobacco and synthetic nicotine products in the state of Oregon.

Studies show that flavored tobacco products appeal to youth¹, who are an easy target for the tobacco industry. Tobacco users (particularly youth) may mistakenly assume that flavored tobacco products are safer than other tobacco products². Their perception of low risk is in part due to flavors masking the natural harshness and taste of tobacco, making flavored tobacco products easier to use and increasing their appeal. The combination of nicotine and flavoring, combined with candy-flavor names such as bubble gum, strawberry, tropical fusion and grape, targets young people and contributes to smoking rates and nicotine addiction at an early age. Research has shown that most smokers began using before the age of 18³, and that youth are more likely to start with a flavored product⁴.

According to the 2017 Oregon Healthy Teens Survey, in Washington County 21% of our high school students and 10% of our middle school students reported having used a tobacco or vaping product with mint, fruit, coffee, candy, or other flavors⁵. These results support previous research in illustrating how significant flavors are in youth initiation of these products, setting our youth up for a potential lifelong battle with addiction.

¹ See, e.g., Shari P. Feirman et al., Flavored Tobacco Products in the United States: A Systematic Review Assessing Use and Attitudes, 18 *Nicotine Tobacco Res.* 739 (2015).

² Oregon Public Health Division, Oregon Health Authority (2014). Flavored Tobacco: Sweet, Cheap, and Within Kids' Reach. *CD Summary*, 63(21). Retrieved from <http://www.oregon.gov/OHA/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/COMMUNICABLEDISEASE/CDSUMMARYNEWSLETTER/Documents/2014/ohd6321.pdf>

³ U.S. Dep't Health & Hum. Servs., The Health Consequences of Smoking — 50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General 708 (Table 13.2) (2014), <https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/50-years-of-progress/full-report.pdf>

⁴ Bridget K. Ambrose et al., Flavored Tobacco Product Use Among US Youth Aged 12–17 Years, 2013–2014, 314 *J. Am. Med. Ass'n* 1871 (2015), <http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2464690>

⁵ Oregon Health Authority (2017), *2017 Oregon Healthy Teens Survey*. Retrieved from http://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/BIRTHDEATHCERTIFICATES/SURVEYS/OREGONHEALTHYTEENS/Documents/2017/County/34_Washington.pdf

Washington County, utilizing the data and best practices in public health prevention, determined a local county ordinance⁶ eliminating flavors from the market was an important step in reducing youth access and reducing the threat of a new generation struggling with the health consequences of tobacco use. Our communities agreed. When put to a referendum, 76% of voters came out strongly in support of keeping the ordinance in our county.

The U.S. Surgeon General's 2014 report states that 5.6 million children alive today will ultimately die early from smoking if we do not do more to reduce current smoking rates³. This proposed bill is necessary to protect youth and young adults from the dangers of tobacco and nicotine dependence.

To continue to support and protect the health of the public, Washington County strongly supports House Bill 3090. Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mjere Simantel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mjere Simantel, MSW
Health and Human Services Director
Washington County

⁶ Washington County Ordinance 878 - CHAPTER 2 - ACCESS TO TOBACCO, SYNTHETIC NICOTINE AND INHALANT DELIVERY SYSTEMS. Retrieved from https://library.municode.com/or/washington_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=APXBLOPUHEAUCO_CH2ACTOSYNIINDESY_2.010FI