

February 5, 2015



UPSTREAM
PUBLIC HEALTH

Dear Chair Kafoury and members of Multnomah County Commissioners,

My name is Nafisa Fai, I work for Upstream Public Health, a statewide health policy nonprofit working to create the conditions in which all Oregonians can be healthy and prosper. I support and applaud your leadership to consider instituting robust tobacco control policies and tobacco retail environment accountability mechanisms. Your leadership in this matter preserves and protects the health of Multnomah County youth and there is no duty more important than ensuring better future for all children, regardless of their cultural and phenotypic diversity or their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Far too many youth smoke tobacco in Oregon. According to the CDC, youth between the ages of 12-17 years, 9.7% smoke, compared to 6.7% across all other states. Equally disturbing, according to the 2015 Healthy Teens survey, 34% of all 11th grade smokers and 42% of all 8th grade smokers reported that they started with electronic cigarettes or other vaping products before migrating to combustible tobacco products. This is a struggle that can be addressed by instituting intentional accountability mechanisms as barriers to block all pathways that warrant exploitation.

Over the summer, Upstream and other funded partners of the REACH grant, conducted youth tobacco prevention summits and focus groups with youth from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds between the ages of 8 to 18. We wanted to understand their perception on tobacco, e-cigarettes, policies and tobacco/nicotine cessation services. What we heard is that, our youth know that “laws are easy, they are easy to maneuver around” and “where there’s a will there’s a way”. Most of the youth that participated in our focus groups all seemed to know a store around their school that either only asked the question are you 18 or that completely didn’t card.

I hope that you consider requiring retailers that sell tobacco and inhalant delivery systems to purchase an annual none-transferable license that comes with education for owners and clerks to ensure compliance and that is enforced in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. I say that because of my experience in the retail environment, not everyone speaks English. We ask that you create a distance between retailers that sell these products to where kids go to school, a buffer zone of 1,000 feet is all we are asking and to impose a minimum pricing and quantities on all other tobacco products that are packages of less than 20. And finally, 90% of adult smokers say that they started smoking before the age of 18, we ask that you change this wide accepted notion and raise the legal age to purchase tobacco to 21.

I believe that these recommendations are low hanging fruit and are rooted in prevention and intervention in the youth years which will assure youth do not become replacement smokers and that prevents lifelong of nicotine addiction. Thank you for your considerations.

Sincerely,

Nafisa Fai
Program Manager
Chronic Disease Prevention
Upstream Public Health