



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

#### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Labor & Government Operations  
Wednesday, February 8, 2023 at 9:30 a.m.

By

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#### HB 551 – RELATING TO HEALTH

Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Garrett, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Cancer Center strongly supports HB 551, which prohibits the sale of flavored tobacco products and the mislabeling of e-liquids as nicotine free.

We support this bill because of findings from our research on Hawai'i adolescents and young adults conducted over the past 6 years. Recent studies have shown that use of electronic smoking devices is quite prevalent among Hawai'i high school and college students. Even at younger ages, the prevalence among middle school students is over 20% of the school population.

Our research has shown that e-cigarette use is linked to several adverse outcomes. Notably, using e-cigarettes is related to initiation of cigarette smoking among previous nonsmokers, hence is contributing to undesirable outcomes. These findings from Hawai'i have been reported in national and international scientific journals. Moreover, our research has shown that e-cigarette use is related to a higher likelihood of respiratory disease (asthma and COPD) among Hawai'i adolescents and young adults. These findings have been confirmed in a number of independent studies conducted in Asia, Europe, and the US mainland. Thus, there is now evidence that e-cigarette use may be linked to adverse health consequences as well as adverse behavioral consequences such as smoking initiation.

HB 551 is important because flavors in tobacco products attract young people to becoming e-cigarette users, who then become addicted to nicotine. Research has shown that the majority of youth e-cigarette users (as many as 80% in some studies)

use a flavored tobacco product. Mint, menthol, and fruit-flavored e-cigarettes are some of the most popular flavors with youth. Our research in Hawai'i shows that higher preference for sweet and mint/menthol flavors among young people is associated with increased addiction to e-cigarettes and decreased likelihood of quitting e-cigarette use. The tobacco companies aggressively market e-cigarettes to Hawai'i youth in television, radio, and point-of-sale advertising venues. Without regulation, e-cigarette manufacturers will continue to aggressively market their products to youth and young adults capitalizing on the appeal of popular flavorings to entice new users to tobacco product use.

Because of the adverse consequences that are known to be related to e-cigarette use, we urge the legislature to regulate the sale of flavored tobacco products. Ending the sale of flavored tobacco products will protect our young people and improve the health of the larger Hawai'i population.

Regulating the sale of flavored tobacco products will also promote health equity, because menthol flavors are disproportionately used by Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, who will then suffer disproportionately from the adverse health consequences of use.

We strongly support HB 551 and ask you to pass this out of committee.