



**Texas House Ways and Means Committee
House Bill 211 by Rep. Shawn Thierry
Testimony by Maria Monge, MD**

**On behalf of:
Texas Pediatric Society
Texas Medical Association
Texas Public Health Coalition**

April 12, 2021

Chair Meyer, Vice Chair Thierry, and Committee Members,

My name is Dr. Maria Monge, and I am a practicing pediatrician in Austin. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Texas Pediatric Society, the Texas Medical Association, and the Texas Public Health Coalition on House Bill 211. We appreciate Vice Chair Thierry's recognition of vaping as a public health epidemic facing our youth and her dedication to addressing it.

Texas physicians are concerned with the high rates of e-cigarette use among youth and the current and future health risks associated with it. In 2019, 27.5% of U.S. high school students and 10.5% of middle school students reported current use of e-cigarettes.¹ In Texas, that would mean more than 1.2 million young people were using e-cigarettes and vaping products. According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, nearly 40% of teens have vaped at least once.² E-cigarettes are the most commonly used tobacco product among teens, and have been since 2015.³

Vaping exposes adolescents to a variety of health risks both in the present and in the future. First, the nicotine in these devices is not benign. Nicotine is a psychoactive drug that is easy to become addicted to, requiring additional levels of nicotine as your body becomes more tolerant. Research has shown that adolescent brains are uniquely susceptible to nicotine addiction,⁴ and nicotine exposure modifies developing brains with long-term effects into adulthood.⁵ Vaping also puts adolescents at risk for e-cigarette or vaping use-associated lung injury (EVALI). In addition to nicotine, we must also be

¹ Wang TW, Neff LJ, Park-Lee E, Ren C, Cullen KA, King BA. E-cigarette Use Among Middle and High School Students — United States, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:1310–1312. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6937e1>.

² Department of State Health Services. [Time to Talk?](#)

³ Texas Adolescent Tobacco and Marketing Surveillance Study (TATAMS). Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. TATAMS project details available online at <http://go.uth.edu/TATAMS>. TATAMS follows a large, population-based cohort (n=3,907; N=491,096) of middle school and high school students in Houston, Dallas-Ft. Worth, San Antonio, and Austin.

⁴ Difranza JR, et al. Initial symptoms of nicotine dependence in adolescents. *Tobacco Control*. 2000;9:313-319. Difranza JR, et al. Symptoms of Tobacco Dependence After Brief Intermittent Use. *Arch Pediatr Adol Med*. 2007;161(7):704-710.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Smoking: 50 Years of Progress. A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2014 (Health consequences of nicotine exposure, pages 120-122)

concerned about the multiple chemicals used in the liquid solution. These chemicals, include propylene glycol and other known carcinogens, are not safe for inhalation.

Teens who vape are more likely to progress to cigarette smoking than their peers who do not – putting them at increased risk for a variety of tobacco-related deaths. We, as a state, are aware of the harmful effects of tobacco. Texas has made major progress in addressing tobacco-related deaths. However, with the increase in e-cigarette use and the progression from vaping to smoking, it is estimated that as many as 498,000 Texas teens will die prematurely from smoking if this is not curbed.⁶ We cannot move backward in addressing tobacco-related injury and mortality.

An additional concern is the considerable risk that smoking and tobacco use become normalized once again. Since the recognition of the harmful effects of smoking and significant intervention efforts to educate youth, smoking has become an unpopular behavior among most young people. However, because e-cigarettes are not subject to the same advertising and other restrictions as tobacco, the behavior is becoming more acceptable. This is especially problematic for children who often cannot perceive the difference between electronic and traditional cigarettes.

Taxing e-cigarettes and vaping products is an important tool to disincentivize price-sensitive youth from purchasing tobacco products and starting a nicotine addiction. Excise taxes have been a successful tool in decreasing the smoking rate among adolescents and will be similarly productive in addressing the vaping epidemic.

However, for these taxes to be effective in discouraging youth from purchasing vaping materials, there needs to be a significant level of taxation. A tax rate of 5 cents per milliliter will not be a large enough disincentive to dissuade adolescents from purchasing e-cigarettes. This rate is significantly lower than the tax on cigarettes, despite the similar risks to teens posed by both types of tobacco use. As e-cigarettes are both dangerous in their own right and a gateway to other tobacco products, there needs to be a stronger disincentive to prevent teens from accessing vaping products.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bill 211. Our coalition stands ready to work towards a solution that will actually reduce vaping use in Texas. For any questions or follow-up, please contact Clayton Travis, director of advocacy and health policy, Texas Pediatric Society, at Clayton.Travis@txpeds.org.

⁶ The Toll of Tobacco in Texas. (2020, January 31). Retrieved May 21, 2020, from www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/texas.