

## Testimony in Support of House Bill 1570

Alexis Raymond

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House Finance and Taxation Committee

Chairman Headland, and members of the House Finance and Taxation Committee, greetings and salutations. My name is Alexis Raymond, and I am a resident in the Bismarck local area with extensive observations of the youth nicotine use and consumption rates in our local area. I work closely with high school students and provide nicotine education to youth ranging from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade up to college students. Thank you so much for your time this morning, I really appreciate it.

Today, I am encouraging a Do Pass on HB 1570, the bill to increase the tobacco tax by \$1.09 bringing North Dakota in alignment with South Dakota's tobacco tax. By implementing this increase, I understand that the revenue would go toward anxiety and depression care for individuals in the state struggling with these mental health issues.

I have had the pleasure of providing nicotine education to several high schools within our local area and learning about what methods youth are using to cope with the stressors that they face at this stage of their life. I have found a common trend of nicotine vapes/e-cigarettes being used amongst this population and middle schoolers to "treat" their mental health issues. Nicotine is an addictive chemical extracted from the tobacco plant and has been manipulated into a flavorful e-juice liquid which has attracted many young people to use these devices.

My focus today is to provide space for the voices of youth that I encounter throughout our local area. Many young people have this belief that vapes/e-cigarettes are the solution for treating anxiety and depression, but some have not examined the addictive nature of nicotine collectively. When a person is undergoing nicotine withdrawal, the symptoms they experience are like anxiety and depression such as irritation, jumpy, restless, having difficulty concentrating, feeling upset, and having trouble sleeping (CDC, 2024).

If I may share my personal experience, I went to provide 3 nicotine education presentations to one of our local high schools and what I encountered was interesting to say the least. My first presentation was to a full auditorium of about 200 students, then for my second presentation, I was escorted into a dark classroom that had night lights in it. I soon learned that students who are experiencing crippling anxiety and depression were present in that room, and I understood that these students could not handle being in an auditorium setting with their peers. No student should have to struggle with these issues alone and even as I presented nicotine education to these students, it felt like my duty to be a voice for them today.

According to the CDC, depression is caused by traumatic or stressful events, medical problems, medications, and using alcohol or drugs (CDC, 2023). As we understand that every young person has their own cultural understanding of substances, but science does prove that adolescent

exposure to nicotine is detrimental to healthy brain development. The increase in the tobacco tax would create an additional barrier to limit the purchasing power of youth (ALA, 2024). This would stand as a step in a progressive direction to transform the health of North Dakota to reclaim our rightful position of the healthiest state in the United States of America. Our children are the reflections of the decisions that we make and as they challenge me every day to be better, I can confidently say vote Do Pass for HB 1570.

Thank you so much for your time, Chairman Headland and Committee.

Alexis Raymond

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References: [7 Common Withdrawal Symptoms | Quit Smoking | Tips From Former Smokers | CDC](#)  
[Mental Health Conditions: Depression and Anxiety | Overviews of Diseases/Conditions | Tips From Former Smokers | CDC](#)  
[Kids and Smoking | American Lung Association](#)