

February 12, 2025

9:30 am CST

House Finance and Taxation Committee for the 69th ND Legislative Assembly

Chairman Headland, and members of the Finance and Taxation Committee. My name is Ryan Wagner, I am a member of the Break Free Youth Board and a senior at Legacy High School in Bismarck. I am here to provide testimony and Support for HB 1570.

In my experience as a high schooler, it is rare that I can go into the bathroom without being greeted by the smell of cotton candy, iced strawberry, or some other vape flavor marketed towards youth. I receive dirty looks and threats for using the bathroom for its intended purpose. Vaping has become a large issue in the state of North Dakota as around 18% of teens submit on anonymous surveys that they vape. While this number has gone down from 33% in 2019, there is still work to be done. Zyns, which are synthetic nicotine pouches, are also becoming extremely common within high schools. These are especially problematic because they have no scent, or flavors just like vapes do, and students are less likely to be caught. Just because students aren't being caught with these does not mean they aren't using them. When you go into the parking lot and look at the ground, and at light poles, they're littered with the synthetic nicotine pouches. Some North Dakota College and University Fraternities also are known to have Zyn Walls, similar to what a gum wall would be years ago. Acts like those make having a nicotine addiction seem trendy and cool. Which is exactly what tobacco companies are in search of. A lot of students choose to use nicotine because of the way it is marketed. Packaging with fun colors and flavors makes vaping appealing and seem harmless.

On top of this, a lot of people look at nicotine as a source of dopamine when they are stressed, anxious or going through symptoms of depression. However nicotine is known to exacerbate these symptoms after giving users a false sense of delight and causes users to become more dependent on nicotine than they were before. The combination of these is a recipe for disaster and addiction. There is a noticeable trend that links increased tobacco taxes with better health outcomes in a state. Higher tobacco taxes tend to reduce smoking rates by making tobacco products more expensive, which discourages people from buying them. This leads to lower rates of smoking-related illnesses such as lung cancer, heart disease, and respiratory conditions. States such as New York, California, New Jersey, Massachusetts, our neighbor to the east Minnesota, and Washington state. All support this as a clear example. Additionally, higher tobacco taxes can generate revenue that states can use to fund public health programs, further improving overall health of the state.

We have made great strides in our community with reducing tobacco use rates and protecting individuals from secondhand smoke. I ask the Finance and Taxation Committee to vote Yes on HB 1570. Thank you. This concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.