



Students, teachers, leaders call on L.A. City Council to act on flavored tobacco in schools

Los Angeles could become the largest city to end the sale of flavored tobacco including menthol, hookah

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 7, 2019

CONTACT: Damaris Lara (213) 924-2419

LOS ANGELES—Students, educators, and community leaders intensified their call for the Los Angeles City Council to pass legislation to end the sale of flavored tobacco citywide. Councilmembers plan to introduce a new ordinance soon, but advocates are concerned that tobacco companies will try to weaken it by adding exemptions.

At a press conference at John Marshall High School in Los Feliz, members of the Los Angeles Families Fighting Flavored Tobacco coalition, school leaders and elected officials cited the urgency to act locally as rates of teen usage of flavored tobacco products continues to rise. While California has made tremendous progress in bringing the high school smoking rate to a historic low of 2%, teen e-cigarette usage is on the rise. Nationally, just in two years, teen usage of e-cigarettes has increased by 135%. In Los Angeles, more than one-third of high school students have tried e-cigarettes.

“I don’t even want to use the bathroom at school because there are girls vaping in there,” said Kyara Artola, a senior at John Marshall High School. “Flavored tobacco products are everywhere in my community and so easy to buy, even if you’re under 21. Most people at my school know that shops don’t look for ID as long as you can pay. But most kids don’t understand that flavors contain nicotine and they don’t know how addictive it will be. The City Council needs to listen to students, stop dragging its feet, and do something before things get even worse.”

“By marketing to kids with bright colors and candy flavors, Big Tobacco is threatening our students’ lives as well as their education. It also interferes with our teachers’ ability to teach and other students’ ability to learn. These multi-billion dollar corporations are preying on kids to ensure they have a future supply of customers. We’ve seen their playbook before from the Marlboro Man to Joe Camel to Kools,” said Los Angeles Unified Board Member Jackie Goldberg. “Big Tobacco is playing with students’ lives and we need to fight back and end the sale of flavored tobacco here in Los Angeles.”

“We are here to join others in the cause to stop this epidemic,” Los Angeles Unified Superintendent Austin Beutner said. “The money we are spending to deal with the trauma vaping is bringing into our schools is money not spent on instruction. Today we are continuing



to fight to ensure those responsible will pay the price to repair the harm done to our students, our schools and the communities we serve.”

“Like schools across the country, the e-cigarette usage has become a crisis practically overnight. We are not immune at any high school in LA. Students don’t know the risks because the companies selling these products don’t want them to know and the flavors mask the danger,” said John Marshall High School Principal Gary Garcia, “School staff confiscates what we find, but we can’t confiscate our way out of this crisis. We need to stop their nicotine supply at the source and end easy access to all flavored tobacco right away.”

Background

The Los Angeles Families Fighting Flavored Tobacco coalition is calling on local leaders to end the sale of flavored tobacco in response to a growing public health crisis impacting L.A. youth. Flavors are extremely popular with young people — four out of five kids who have used tobacco started with a flavored product.

Youth use of flavored tobacco products has skyrocketed — 83% of Los Angeles high school students who use tobacco use flavored products and a majority started using tobacco with flavored products. One in ten L.A. high school students is a current e-cigarette user. Nearly 60% of L.A. youth cigarette smokers have used menthol cigarettes in the last 30 days. The nicotine in these products can worsen anxiety, mood swings, learning disabilities, and headaches, making it harder for students to concentrate in class.

Recently, Los Angeles Unified filed a lawsuit against Juul and stated they aim to solve the youth e-cigarette epidemic affecting student’s health, learning, and education. According to Los Angeles Unified, student vaping incidences throughout Los Angeles Unified have increased tenfold since 2013. During the 2018-19 academic year alone, there were approximately 435 critical incidents reported, however, these numbers dramatically underestimate the total incidences of vaping and e-cigarette use on campus, as they reflect only critical incidents reported by principals. By the end of the current school year, the number of critical incidents is expected to be substantially higher.

Recently, the California Department of Public Health warned residents to stop vaping now due to concerns over the climbing number of people falling ill and dying from e-cigarette-related lung illnesses. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported 1,888 e-cigarette related illnesses and 37 deaths. While the cause of these illnesses is still unknown, a former Juul employee alleged that the best-selling e-cigarette manufacturer knowingly sent over 1 million contaminated mint pods to e-cigarette retailers, endangering customers in order to protect their bottom line. Last month, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance to end the sale of flavored tobacco in unincorporated areas by a unanimous vote last month.