



Written Testimony on HB 2340 (Proponent)
House Federal & State Affairs Committee
Submitted by: John Allison, Superintendent
February 22, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony **supporting HB 2340**, a bill that would increase the minimum age to 21 to purchase or possess cigarettes and tobacco products. This bill would codify in Kansas law actions taken by the federal government to raise the purchase age of tobacco and vaping products to 21.

Olathe Public Schools appreciates this committee's thoughtful consideration of legislation that will curb youth smoking and vaping in our schools. Our role as a public school district is to provide students with a high-quality and safe *educational environment* to help them learn and grow.

Olathe Public Schools continue to experience significant problems with student use of e-cigarettes. Among other things, use of these products:

- disrupt the district's educational mission;
- divert substantial resources as we work to abate and prevent such use; and
- pose a significant risk to the health and well-being of our students.

Though our students are smart, they do not fully understand the long-term impact of vaping and the amount of addictive chemicals they are dealing with. Many students report being unaware these products contain nicotine because they do not smell, taste, or have the same immediate physical reactions (e.g., throat or nasal irritation).

The easy access to these products by our youth makes this public health issue even more challenging for our schools. Students who are of the legal age of purchase at 18 often become suppliers of the products to younger students. While we understand this will not totally stem the tide in our schools, we do see it as an important tool in keeping these products out of our students' hands.

Research has long shown the adolescent brain to be uniquely vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and other addictive products. The tobacco industry has capitalized on that fact, understanding those who become addicted in their youth are more likely to become life-long users of their products, thereby ensuring their bottom line for decades.

The Olathe Board of Education strongly urges the committee to pass out HB 2340 favorably. If you have any questions about this testimony or Olathe Public Schools' initiatives related to this issue, please contact me or Brent Yaeger, Assistant Superintendent for Learning Services at (913) 780-8022.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your work on behalf of Kansas communities.