

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator Gary Stevens

## *SPONSOR STATEMENT*

### *SENATE BILL 45*

#### *Increasing the Minimal Age for Tobacco and E-Cigarettes: "T-21"*

Senate Bill 45 proposes two key policies: 1) to align state law with federal law in raising the minimum age to buy, sell or possess tobacco and electronic smoking products (ESP's) from age 19 to 21; and 2) to include ESP's under the wholesale tax structure in existence for other tobacco products.

In December 2019, Congress passed and the President signed into law a provision raising the age of sale and possession for all tobacco, nicotine and ESP products to age 21 nationally \*with no exceptions\*.

Preventing illegal vendor sales is a critical part of the overall effort to prevent and reduce youth smoking. Alaska has an active underage sales enforcement program which has been effective in reducing sales of smoking products to minors. Updating Alaska statutes from 19 to 21 to mirror the federal minimum age of sale and possession of these products will allow our state enforcement program to be effective.

Between 2017 and 2018, the National Youth Tobacco Survey saw a 78% increase in current use of E-cigarettes; from 11.7% to 20.8% among high school students. This is largely due to a prevalence of flavors, use of social media, word of mouth, and marketing tactics intended to attract teens. Nationwide, 80% of high school students do not perceive a great risk of harm from using e-cigarettes regularly. According to the Truth Initiative, teens who vape are 4x more likely to start smoking cigarettes.

Despite claims that e-cigarettes help adults quit smoking, or offer adults a "safe" alternative to smoking, E-cigarettes are under regulated and have not been found by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to be effective in helping smokers actually quit, let alone to be legitimately "safe." Almost all e-cigarettes contain some amount of nicotine and some contain as much or more nicotine as a pack of cigarettes.

Meanwhile, tobacco taxes have been proven to reduce youth tobacco use, resulting in fewer kids becoming life-long smokers, and thus ultimately reducing healthcare costs. In addition to deterring kids from beginning to use these products, tobacco taxes help adults who want to quit, do so. Other Tobacco Products (OTP) in Alaska are taxed at 75% of wholesale price. SB 45 proposes to add ESP's to the OTP definition to be taxed at the current rate of 75% of wholesale price.

Thank you for your consideration of this important piece of legislation.