

Opening Statement
Chairwoman Anna G. Eshoo
Subcommittee on Health
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Legislation to Reverse the Youth Tobacco Epidemic”
October 16, 2019

Smoking kills. It is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.

Cigarette smoking is responsible for more than 480,000 deaths in the U.S. each year and more than 16 million Americans are living with a disease caused by smoking. These health problems cost our country more than \$300 billion a year.

But despite knowing the consequences of smoking for over half a century, we’re still raising children who smoke.

In 2018, 4.9 million middle and high school students were current users of some type of tobacco product or e-cigarette. Many of those children will be life-long smokers. Over 90% of adult smokers began smoking before they turned 21.

The tobacco industry knows the best way to continue their business is to aggressively target children with their addictive products, so that they’ll have guaranteed customers for decades.

That’s why ten years ago, I was proud to vote, along with both Democratic and Republican members of this committee, for the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009. This law restricted marketing tobacco products to children and banned most of the flavored cigarettes made to appeal to children.

After that law passed, youth tobacco use declined.

But e-cigarettes reversed that trend. For the first time in decades, the CDC reports youth tobacco use is rising significantly. Because of e-cigarettes, 1.5 million more youth used a tobacco product in 2018 compared to 2017. High school e-cigarette users are 4 to 7 times more likely to adopt traditional cigarette use than their nonvaping peers.

Our work to end tobacco use and nicotine addiction in the U.S. is at risk.

We’ve been caught flat-footed by the popularity of e-cigarettes among young people. And now, in the midst of the youth ecigarette epidemic, we’re seeing an outbreak of a vaping-related illness with nearly 1,300 cases and 26 deaths. This illness is affecting children -- 36% of the patients are under 20 years old.

Just last month, the FDA Acting Commissioner told our Oversight Subcommittee that the FDA “should have acted sooner” to rein in e-cigarettes.

Despite the lessons from the Tobacco Control Act of 2009, we haven’t extended its bipartisan restrictions to e-cigarettes.

The bill we’re considering today, Chairman Pallone and Representative Shalala’s Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act, fixes that problem. The bill extends tobacco marketing, sale, flavor restrictions and fees to e-cigarettes, while also making the landmark change of raising the minimum age to buy tobacco products to 21 years.

This bill will save lives. Raising the tobacco age to 21 will result in a quarter of a million fewer premature deaths for those born between 2000 and 2019. It is comprehensive legislation that will reverse youth e-cigarette use and drive down youth tobacco use overall.

We can’t allow young Americans to be ensnared in nicotine addiction. It’s time to do everything we can to end youth tobacco use. I look forward to working with all my colleagues on a bill to do just that.