

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “Vaping in America: E-Cigarette Manufacturers’ Impact on Public Health”
February 5, 2020

I am pleased we are holding this hearing so that we can shed more light on the youth tobacco epidemic and how we got here.

The significant progress that was made to curb tobacco use has simply vanished. Last year, 6.2 million middle school and high school students reported using tobacco products—including one in three high school students and one in eight middle school students. These are shocking and concerning numbers.

And today, we’re here to not only ask how this happened, but what is going to be done to reverse these dangerous new trends in tobacco use. While federal regulators share in this blame, a large portion of culpability rests with the manufacturers of e-cigarette products.

These manufacturers saw an opportunity to hook a new generation on their products and used every trick in the book to make their products appeal to kids through sweet flavors, glossy marketing campaigns and slick product designs.

It is long past time that the Food and Drug Administration move forward with reviewing the health and safety risks of the e-cigarette products that are currently on the market. And then the FDA must act swiftly to remove any products that are not in compliance.

But it is also time for the manufacturers—including those before us today—to acknowledge the responsibility they have to ensure young people are protected from a lifetime of nicotine addiction.

We do not know all of the long-term health implications of e-cigarette use, but we do know that nicotine harms the developing brain and that young people who use e-cigarettes are more likely to try combustible cigarettes as well.

That is why I am so disappointed that President Trump chose to side with industry over the nation’s public health by permitting flavored products to remain on the market like menthol, disposable e-cigarettes, and open tank systems mixed in vape shops.

The President’s announcement last month falls far short of the promises he made last year to address the youth tobacco epidemic.

Don’t be fooled—a so-called flavor ban that exempts menthol and vape shops is not a ban at all.

And that is also why it is critical that we continue to move forward legislatively with a solution since this Administration will not.

I look forward to bringing my bill, the Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act, to the floor soon. My legislation not only includes a full flavor ban, it also bans certain non-face-to-face sales and protects kids from predatory marketing.

It is a comprehensive approach to end this epidemic, and I hope that it garners the bipartisan support that it deserves when it comes to the floor.

In the meantime, I want to hear more from the manufacturers and what role they believe their companies have played in the creation of this epidemic and what they are doing to correct it.

It is chilling to sit and watch as we are seeing history repeat itself. We have been here before as the tobacco industry admitted to misleading millions of users on the safety of tobacco products.

We cannot sit idly by as this happens again.

For that reason, I hope the witnesses today are forthcoming and acknowledge the role they must play in reversing these dangerous and disturbing trends.

Thank you and I yield back.