

My name is Matt Meunier. I'm a Student Assistance Program counselor at a CVU High School, and I also serve as a college baseball coach at Saint Michael's College. In both roles, I work every day with students who are struggling with mental health, substance use, and the many pressures that come with being a young person today.

I'm here today in support of the provisions in this bill that eliminate penalties for youth possession, use, and purchase of tobacco and nicotine products, and instead shift accountability toward the systems and retailers that supply those products.

From my perspective, youth nicotine use is a serious health issue and very often a coping issue. Many of the students I work with are not using nicotine to be rebellious. They are anxious, depressed, overwhelmed, or trying to manage stress. When the response is a ticket or a legal consequence, it doesn't address why the student is using in the first place. More time than not, it creates shame and secrecy. Students become more worried about getting in trouble than about getting help. Their fear makes it harder for them to be honest with adults and delays the moment when we can actually intervene.

I would like to share a brief example with a student I've worked with.

I worked with a family who had a son struggling with nicotine use. His parents were extremely engaged and proactive. Over the course of more than a year, they contacted online retailers, blocked deliveries to their home, and did everything they could to prevent access. They contacted me and tried hard to track down where he was getting products locally.

Despite all of that effort, he was still able to find a connection in the community and continue getting nicotine. We are confident he uses to this day.

Ultimately, when I think about the impact this bill could have, I think about student and families, like those. They are doing everything they can, everything I might do for my own son if he found himself in the same situation, yet the nicotine is still finding its way into the hands of young people. Punishing the student in this situation does not fix the real problem, ACCESS.

My experience in schools has informed me this issue is a supply issue, not a possession issue. Students are getting these products from older friends, adults, online sources, or local connections. Holding the young person accountable after the fact doesn't reduce that supply.

It is my belief this bill shifts the focus in a more effective direction, towards retailers and the systems providing access.

From a school perspective, this change would allow us to focus more on what actually works: prevention, honest conversations, early intervention, and cessation support. When students know they won't face legal penalties for being honest, they are far more likely to open up and accept help.

To conclude, eliminating penalties for youth possession and shifting accountability to the supply side aligns the law with what we know works in schools and in public health. It gives students a better chance to be honest, to seek help, and to make healthier choices.