

Speech in Support of House Bill 2562 - Nicotine-Free Generation

Good evening, and thank you for the opportunity to speak in strong support of House Bill 2562—the Nicotine-Free Generation policy.

As a public health official and Health Director, I've seen firsthand the damage nicotine addiction does to our communities. And yet, even with everything we know about tobacco's harms, the industry continues to innovate, market, and profit from addiction. It's time for us to take a bold and principled stand.

The premise of this bill is simple: Anyone born after January 1, 2004, would no longer be able to purchase nicotine products in Massachusetts. This is not a ban. It's a phased, forward-looking policy designed to stop addiction before it starts—without taking anything away from current users.

Let's be clear: **nicotine addiction isn't a choice—it's a trap.** Nearly 9 out of 10 smokers start before age 18, and the industry knows it. That's why they've spent over **\$8 billion annually on advertising**, with new flavored, sleekly packaged, and highly addictive products designed to appeal to youth. It's a business model built on addiction, dressed up in candy flavors and social media ads.

And this brings me to a critical point. Opponents of this policy often say we should "trust the system" or "let the market regulate itself." But in this case, **trusting the tobacco industry to self-regulate is like trusting the fox to guard the henhouse.** The very entities profiting from addiction are asking us to believe they'll police themselves. History has shown us how that ends—millions dead, families devastated, and another generation ensnared.

Let's take a look at one of the industry's newest products: **nicotine pouches.** Marketed as "safer alternatives" to smoking, they're being pushed as a harm reduction tool. But let's be honest—this isn't about health, it's about **preserving market share.**

Emerging research is already raising red flags about the health effects of nicotine pouches. These are highly concentrated, fast-absorbing nicotine products, with unknown long-term impacts. Yet the tobacco industry promotes them as clean, discreet, and somehow safe—while glossing over the fact that **they're just another vehicle for addiction**, especially among youth.

This is the industry's playbook: create the harm, then market the "solution." It's like a company that spills oil into the ocean, then tries to sell us bottled water as environmental stewardship. When the industry that profits from addiction claims to be leading harm reduction, we should all be deeply skeptical.

Let's be clear—addiction profiteers don't get to write the public health rules. Allowing them to self-regulate and claim they're part of the solution is not just naïve—it's dangerous.

Tonight, you may hear arguments about black markets or personal freedom. Let's address those head-on.

First, the black market argument. When Needham became the first community in the country to raise the tobacco purchase age to 21, critics predicted chaos. What actually happened? Youth smoking rates plummeted by 50%—the steepest drop on record. Similar fears are being raised now, but the data doesn't support them. Phasing out access gradually—as this policy does—gives communities and businesses time to adapt without creating a vacuum for illegal sales.

Second, personal freedom. Is it really freedom when a teenager—manipulated by marketing and peer pressure—becomes addicted to one of the hardest substances to quit? Is it freedom if that choice leads to a lifetime of disease and dependency? The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court settled this debate in 1949, ruling that "the right to engage in business must yield to the paramount right of government to protect the public health by any rational means."

And this is exactly that—a rational, evidence-based, forward-thinking policy.

This bill is not about judgment. It's about **protection**. It protects those who have never smoked from being hooked. It respects the rights of current users. And it builds on Massachusetts' legacy as a leader in public health—from Tobacco 21 to flavor bans, we've led before. The NFG policy is the natural next step.

Melrose, Wakefield, and Stoneham—our communities—have already adopted this policy. We've shown it can be done locally. With House Bill 2562, we can lead again—this time, statewide.

Let's protect the next generation from addiction, disease, and industry deception. Let's stop pretending the fox has the hens' best interests at heart.

Let's pass House Bill 2562.

Thank you.