

Thursday, February 13, 2025

Dear Mr. Dupuis, Dr. Van Den Berghe, Mr. Mora, Ms. Tobin, and Dr. Meaney,

I'm writing to you as a life-long Lynn resident, prevention specialist, and the daughter of someone who lost their life to their cigarette addiction.

I'm sure you have seen recent news stories about the latest products Big Tobacco is marketing to entice young people to try nicotine. As you know, experimenting with vapes, nicotine or cigarettes, especially with today's high-nicotine products – is one step away from becoming addicted with all the consequences that an addiction to nicotine entails. Nicotine pouches with as much as 30 mg of nicotine in a single tiny pouch, vapes disguised as highlighters and vapes in a Bic pen with an ink pen that actually writes are attractive to young and old alike. Now, some vape devices even have an LED screen that tells you how many puffs you have left to trigger you to get another one.

A lifetime of addiction means big money - the industry counts on it. They need new customers to replace old customers.

There is a huge amount of data about all the health issues, and deaths, caused by tobacco use. We all know that smoking is still the leading cause of preventable death in the US.

I know the arguments against tighter restrictions. Arguments like, "We let kids go into the military at 18. Why not let them decide on smoking?" Well, for one, a high school graduate who is addicted to nicotine can't join the military and in some jurisdictions can't become a police officer or a firefighter.

Young people addicted to nicotine have trouble concentrating and not only are they distracted in class, they cause distractions for their classmates as they become increasingly anxious to get to a school bathroom to vape. We have case studies of students waking up in the middle of the night to take a hit from the vape hidden under their pillow.

I could go on and on. The point is that Big Tobacco continues to use their billions to develop and market new products that appeal to our youth...disproportionately to minority youth. Youth nicotine use is a serious issue in spite of all the strong tobacco policies Massachusetts and our local Boards of Health have passed over the years.

In my own prevention work, I've met people who have lost loved ones to nicotine addiction and those who are struggling with it themselves. Emotions run high and vast, including anger, sadness, resentment and even guilt. But one emotion seems to be consistent...frustration. Conversations about taking on Big Tobacco seem daunting and never ending. Is there anything we can do to break the impact of nicotine when there's so much money behind its promotion? Well, yes, now there IS something.

I've been watching with great interest, and hope, as more and more Massachusetts communities consider and adopt a new tobacco prevention policy known as Nicotine Free Generation (14 in total as of today, with more considering it). I was happy to learn of the January 2025 bills introduced in the Massachusetts legislature to enact Nicotine Free Generation (NFG). But I was disheartened to learn that legislative enactment will take three (or more) years.

NFG is a simple policy with a birthdate cut off instead of the Age 21 requirement we have now. In addition...

. No one who is already of legal age to buy is affected – just those not yet 21. No one has a "privilege" taken away. They're grandfathered in.

. It's a slow roll-out that gives retailers time to adjust to slightly lower tobacco sales each year rather than the total removal of products on day one. I work for a small business myself part-time. I know how important it is to have these changes in revenue OVER TIME, versus immediately.

. It's easier for store clerks - they have to remember just one date instead of calculating a new birthdate every single day.

. It widens the gap between our 18 year-old high school students and their slightly older peers who can legally buy tobacco. Over time there won't be that social network of 21 and 22 year-olds who hang out with and buy for slightly younger friends who can't legally buy.

My father, Ed "Lucky" Luckiewicz, taught in the Lynn public schools for 40 years. 19 at Eastern Junior High, 1 year at Pickering and 21 at Tech. He started smoking at age 14, enticed by the image of the Marlboro Man. Ironically, he developed an addiction to Lucky Strikes. For my entire life, he struggled with nicotine addiction, never able to quit for himself, for his family, nor his own health. I remember trying to hide his cigarettes to save him when I was 10, because I learned about smoking risks at school, not knowing what addiction really meant...that'd he'd just get more.

Finally, at age 70, my dad quit for good, hoping that, in his words, he "beat the possibility of lung cancer." He was wrong. At age 74 he was diagnosed with an aggressive lung cancer and passed away only 10 days later with my mother and I by his side as he struggled to inhale and exhale. He knew he was dying, but he didn't want to leave us. Some of his last statements, before he became winded from simply talking, were to express his love for his family and how he wished he never started smoking. Ever.

It's for this very personal reason that I hope that Lynn is considering NFG, one of the most important public health policies to fight Big Tobacco's millions.

I admit, local Boards of Health have to be brave to take on this industry. But there are people available to help and educate. Please let me know if there is anything I can do help. I have policy templates, know experts who can provide testimony, and experience in assisting other towns with passing their own NFG.

I want to be part of saving this next generation from the consequences of nicotine addiction.

Thank you for your consideration and for your public service,

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