

May 2, 2023  
RE: SF2995



Dear Chair Wiklund, Chair Liebling and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Tobacco-Free Alliance (TFA) to ask that you include two important policies in the final Health omnibus bill. TFA is a nonprofit organization working in the Twin Cities to prevent youth from using commercial tobacco and to prioritize communities adversely affected by industry marketing and health disparities.

1. We would like to thank the Senate and House for including language (Senate Article 4, Sections 3 and 35 and House Article 3, Sections 3 and 70) to dedicate any potential funds from the JUUL lawsuit to youth tobacco prevention, help those addicted to commercial tobacco quit, and address tobacco-related health disparities.

The JUUL lawsuit settlement presents an opportunity to invest greatly needed additional state funds for tobacco prevention and treatment. TFA staff have seen firsthand the harms JUUL products have caused and the role they played in the ongoing youth vaping epidemic. We now have an entire generation of young people who would never pick up a cigarette, who, when we talk with them, describe cigarettes as “gross” and “disgusting” and who are well-versed in the harms caused by cigarette smoking. However, thanks to JUUL and its targeted marketing to young people, its compact and easy to conceal design, and its formulation to easily inhale high amounts of nicotine, we have a youth e-cigarette problem of epidemic proportions, which started when JUUL came on the market. Youth nicotine dependence from vaping remains at epidemic levels and adequate funding is needed to support prevention and treatment. Teens do not intend to get addicted to nicotine and underestimate the risk. They are surprised how easy it is to lose control and become nicotine dependent. To illustrate this point, one participant from a teen focus group on vaping we conducted shared: *“I used to only vape at school for the buzz but then things got a little bit rough in life, then I got a little bit addicted and it just kind of went downhill from there.”*

2. We support House language (Article 1, Sections 23 and 31) to ensure Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare enrollees receive comprehensive tobacco cessation treatment benefits without barriers and expands the types of providers that can be reimbursed for providing tobacco treatment counseling.

Thank you for considering these important public health policies as you put together a final Health and Human Services omnibus bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elyse Less".

Elyse Levine Less, JD, MPH  
Executive Director, Tobacco-Free Alliance