

Statement before the New York State Senate Committees on Consumer Protection, Health, and Education on Vaping and Electronic Cigarette Safety.

End the vaping hysteria and focus on helping vulnerable populations with the highest rates of smoking switch to e-cigarettes.

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I'm an expert in addiction and have worked with adult drug users for over 15 years in medical, housing and mental health settings. Today I want to comment on three things: Vulnerable populations and smoking, the vaping hysteria and the consequences of banning vaping devices or flavors. The highest rates of smoking are among people who have mental health problems, the homeless and people who use drugs. Stats: Schizophrenia: 64-74%, Depression: 34-60%, bipolar: 69%, alcohol dependence: 67.9%, homeless: 70-78%, poor people: 30%. These groups have very low quit rates and account for 40 percent of all cigarettes smoked in the US. People with psychiatric diagnosis die on average 8 to 25 years before the general population. Moreover, smokers are disproportionately people of color. That's who is left smoking in the US - the most vulnerable, stigmatized groups. At New York Harm Reduction Educators (NYHRE) in East Harlem, I've facilitated tobacco harm reduction/vaping groups. I helped participants make the switch to e-cigarettes. The majority were able to transition successfully to vaping in three months. It was amazing. They loved the vaping devices and the flavored liquids. Most participants reported improvements in their health and in their quality of life. Vaping worked for them when all the other NRT's they had tried did not. So why is the focus not on the people I work with? Why are we not helping smokers with the highest rates of morbidity and mortality transition to a vastly safer nicotine delivery product so they can live? Instead there is an obsessive focus on a small group of teens who vape. Moreover, the extreme anti-vaping propaganda and the junk science that is published are infuriating and it's negatively affecting the ability for researchers to conduct studies using vaping products.

The organizations Truth Initiative, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids and Parents Against Vaping E-cigarettes are directly responsible for whipping up and maintaining vaping hysteria. These groups are new iterations of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Parents Opposed to Pot, and Citizens Against Legalizing Marijuana. They want to ban vaping and are using their white privilege, their power, resources and connections to men like billionaire Michael Bloomberg to do it. They want to make it illegal for the most vulnerable groups of smokers who are disproportionately people of color to have access to these life saving devices. I am outraged by that.

Prohibition never works. We are in the midst have an opioid-related overdose crisis. Heroin is illegal but you can buy a bag of it for \$10. Bans create illicit markets that sell products that kill and harm people. Also, the enforcement of a ban on vaping products will not be race or class neutral. The NYPD will go to the neighborhood where they murdered Eric Garner to enforce the ban, they will go in to NYCHA buildings, they will go in to communities of color. All bans on drugs (including nicotine) are racist and classist and must be opposed. Have we learned nothing from the racist history of drug panics and prohibition in the US?