



October 4, 2019

Board of Education
School District No 093 (Conseil scolaire francophone)
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Richmond BC V6V 2J8
Delivered via email: mariepierre_lavoie@csf.bc.ca
ATTN: Chairperson Lavoie and the Board of Education

Dear Chairperson and the Board of Education:

I am writing to you today to ask for your support in demanding action from the B.C. Government to address surging youth vaping rates.

A new school year has begun and teen vaping is on the rise at an alarming rate. Earlier this summer, an article published by the British Medical Journal indicated that vaping among youth in Canada aged 16 to 19 is up 74 per cent since last year, and it's estimated that 30 per cent of B.C. teens in grades 10 to 12 are vaping on a regular basis.

Almost daily, we're hearing stories about people getting sick, and in some cases, even dying, as a result of vaping. There now appears to be an indisputable link between this practice and several dangerous and harmful acute health impacts, not to mention the potential long-term health implications that are not yet known.

Our kids are being drawn in and hooked to this unhealthy practice in increasing numbers as a direct result of the efforts vape companies have made to deliberately target youth with kid-friendly e-cigarette flavours like fruit medley, gummy bear, and mango. These companies – and the tobacco companies which own substantial interests in most of them – have also targeted our kids with savvy marketing and advertising. This is especially prevalent on social media, where sleek, modern, compact drug delivery devices are promoted in alluring packaging.

On April 11, 2019, I introduced a Private Member's Bill in the B.C. Legislature focused on taking action to combat rising levels of youth vaping here in our province. At the time, B.C.'s Minister of Health, Adrian Dix, and many other members of the government indicated that they shared my concerns about this public health issue and that they were committed to working with me to implement tough action to protect our kids from the harmful effects of vaping.

Unfortunately, nearly six months later, no action has yet been taken by the B.C. government, though Mr. Dix has suggested in recent media reports that government does intend to announce their intentions soon.

Numerous jurisdictions across North America have already said enough is enough and have taken action to curb youth vaping. Just last week, Washington State became the latest U.S. state to ban flavoured e-cigarettes via an emergency order of the governor, joining Michigan, New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, which have also taken this step. Numerous other U.S. states and jurisdictions – not to mention the U.S. federal government – are moving in the same direction. I believe that the B.C. government should do the same.

While I understand the B.C. government has recently indicated its desire to await further action from Health Canada, it is impractical to assume any immediate follow-up from Ottawa until the current federal election is over, a federal government has been sworn in, and federal cabinet priorities have been established. All of the above will take many months, which would mean losing almost the entire school year. We simply cannot allow that to happen.

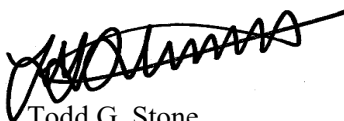
My Private Member's Bill would legislate the banning of flavoured vapour products, the implementation of tighter retail controls (restricting sales to vape shops, tobacco shops and pharmacies), and would ensure tougher penalties for non-compliance. I've also called for the B.C. government to provide the resources necessary to fund evidence-based awareness, prevention and support programs – delivered by youth for youth – in every middle and high school across B.C. There are existing programs – such as Preventure – which have been piloted in various schools to date and have demonstrated promising results as students in schools with this program were less likely to use illicit drugs, cannabis and tobacco. And finally, there needs to be tougher online retail controls implemented for the sale of vape products (including age-verification), a complete ban on all marketing and advertising of vape products (exactly as is the case today for all tobacco products), reduced nicotine concentrations and enhanced enforcement.

I thank you and all professionals in B.C.'s education system for the efforts being made on the ground in classrooms today to combat youth vaping, and I would be very interested to learn from you as to any successful strategies and best practices to combat youth vaping that you've implemented or are aware of. That said, more needs to be done which is why I ask you to join me in urging the B.C. government to take immediate action on this important issue to prevent an entire generation of our youth from becoming addicted to nicotine and suffering potential acute and long-term negative health effects due to vaping.

It would be appreciated if wrote a letter to Minister Adrian Dix urging him to take action on this issue. Please copy me on your letter and e-mail it to me at t.stone@leg.bc.ca. As well, if you would like to discuss this matter further, I would be happy to take your call at 250-374-2880.

We need to work together to keep our kids safe and healthy. As one parent said to me recently in the context of no action having yet been taken in B.C. to combat youth vaping, "Our kids deserve better from us." I couldn't agree more.

Regards,



Todd G. Stone
MLA Kamloops – South Thompson

cc. Superintendent St-Amant
Dan Davis, MLA Official Opposition Education Critic

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