UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Health
March 14, 2016 at 2:15 pm
By
Robert Bley-Vroman, Chancellor
and
Jerris Hedges, MD, MS, MMM
Dean, John A. Burns School of Medicine
Interim Director, University of Hawaiʻi Cancer Center
University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa

SB 2691 SD2 – RELATING TO CHAPTER 245, HAWAII REVISED STATUTES

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Creagan, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawaiʻi Cancer Center strongly supports this bill.

The UH Cancer Center is one of only 69 institutions in the United States that hold the prestigious National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation, and is the only NCI-designated center in the Pacific. The NCI designation provides cancer researchers in Hawaiʻi greater access to federal funding and research opportunities. More importantly, it gives the people of Hawaiʻi and the Pacific region access to many innovative and potentially life-saving clinical trials without the necessity of traveling to the mainland.

Our passion at the UH Cancer Center is to be a world leader in eliminating cancer through research, education and improved patient care. Because tobacco consumption is a leading preventable cause of cancer, we take all issues related to tobacco in Hawaiʻi very seriously. Whereas the UH Cancer Center always has supported strong tobacco control measures in Hawaiʻi, the recent emergence of electronic smoking devices (e-cigarettes) presents new challenges for tobacco control and tobacco-related legislation.

To address these challenges, UH Cancer Center researchers have been actively involved in conducting studies about cigarette smoking and e-cigarette use among adolescents and young adults in Hawaiʻi, a vulnerable population for initiation of both cigarette smoking and e-cigarette use.

The UH Cancer Center perspective on electronic smoking devices is informed by data recently obtained from Hawaiʻi adolescents and young adults who are participants in original research conducted by our own faculty. Research conducted in Hawaiʻi high schools by Thomas Wills, PhD, has confirmed that rates of e-cigarette use by Hawaiʻi adolescents are at least double the rate of e-cigarette use observed in studies of mainland adolescents. Furthermore, his study published in the peer-reviewed journal

Pediatrics clarified a reason why e-cigarette use is growing nationally among teens, as his data suggest that e-cigarettes may be operating to recruit lower-risk adolescents to smoking. And recently Pallav Pokhrel, PhD, and Thaddeus Herzog, PhD, published on the topic of e-cigarettes and motivation to quit smoking. Drs. Pokhrel and Herzog also assessed differences between smokers who used e-cigarettes to quit versus those who used FDA-approved nicotine replacement therapy. Additionally, these researchers have published on the effects of e-cigarette marketing on harm perceptions, as well as e-cigarette use expectancies and their impact on e-cigarette use among young adults.

This research is vital to gaining an evidence-based understanding of what drives acceptance of this emerging technology, what users believe regarding its safety, and what the consequences are for adolescents, whose brains are particularly susceptible to nicotine.

We believe imposing an excise tax on disposable electronic smoking devices, reusable electronic smoking devices, and e-liquid sold by any wholesaler or dealer like the excise tax imposed on the sale of cigarettes creates fairness in the market place. There is serious concern among health professionals that addictive tobacco products other than cigarettes – including snuff, chewing tobacco, loose roll-your-own tobacco, and now electronic smoking devices – are attracting a new generation of tobacco users. While the dangers of smoking are well known, national research also tells us there is no safe form of tobacco use. Taxation also provides a disincentive for e-cigarette use among youth and thus may help to reduce the rate of cigarette smoking.

We respectfully request that a portion of the tax on electronic smoking devices be allocated to the Hawai‘i Cancer Research Special Fund. The additional revenue generated would allow the UH Cancer Center to continue to provide innovative clinical trials in Hawai‘i to help prevent and treat cancer, and to continue its research on the causes of and cures for cancer, including research into natural products found only in Hawai‘i.

We respectfully urge you to pass this bill.