

2/14/2017

Hugh "Bert" Brown

Testimony for Kansas Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee

Re: Support for SB45

Madam Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. My name is Hugh "Bert" Brown. I am a resident of Olathe, KS, a vapor consumer with no financial ties to the vapor industry, and the volunteer president of the Kansas City chapter of the Consumer Advocates for Smoke-free Alternatives Association. I am here to urge support for SB54 which will clarify how the tax on vapor products is imposed.

Almost 5 years ago, I made the decision to switch to low-risk, smoke-free vapor products and end my 18 year smoking addiction. The fact that vapor products were an affordable option compared to traditional smoking cessation products factored heavily in my decision. Vapor products were even more affordable than cigarettes. Since I stopped smoking, my health has improved and I have likely added years to my life.

Since 2007, vapor products have helped millions of smokers switch to delivery system that the Royal College of Physicians has stated is at least 95% safer than combustible cigarettes. This technology product is saving millions of people from disease and early death.

Sin taxes are imposed on cigarettes and other risky products as part of a strategy to deter use. But, vapor products are low-risk, smoke-free alternatives to cigarettes. Extra taxes on vapor products only punish myself and other former smokers for how we choose to live a smoke-free life.

The current tax on vapor products will create unnecessary barriers to access in Kansas. First, by equating vapor products with cigarettes, the state is sending the inaccurate and confusing message to consumers that vaping is just as harmful as smoking. A consequence of this misinformation will be that many smokers will be discouraged from switching to a smoke-free product.

Second, to avoid the extra cost, Kansas consumers will simply shop online or out-of-state. Many living in border counties will spend their money in Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado, and Oklahoma. Kansas vapor business will struggle to compete and many will be pressured to close their doors. When vapor retail shops close, consumers lose access to expert instruction and information about vapor products. We also lose access to a vital support community of former smokers.

Although I am expressing support for SB54 because it is effectively a step in the right direction, I remain strongly opposed to any extra taxes on vapor products. Not only will the state of Kansas fail to see the projected revenues from the existing tax, but thousands of Kansans will suffer the consequences of being discouraged from switching to a low-risk alternative to cigarettes. While the Department of Revenue will measure this loss in dollars, Kansas will be measuring this mistake in lives.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,
Hugh "Bert" Brown