



February 7, 2023

To: Representative Scot Z. Matayoshi, Chair  
Representative Andrew Takuya Garrett, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee  
House Committee on Labor & Government Operations

Re: Testimony in Support of HB551, Relating to Health

Hrg: February 8, 2023, 9:30AM, House Conference room 309 via Videoconference

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 450 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy. Additionally, HPHA aims to call attention to issues around social justice and equity in areas that extend beyond the traditional context of health (e.g., education, digital equity, cultural sensitivity), which can have profound impacts on health equity and well-being. Therefore, as stewards of public health, HPHA is also advocating for equity in all policies.

**We strongly support HB551, which prohibits the sale of flavored tobacco.** The youth vaping epidemic presents a significant public health risk. In Hawai'i, one in three high school students and one in five middle school students report current use of e-cigarettes. Flavored tobacco products are a significant driver of the vaping epidemic as 8 in 10 children start vaping with a flavored tobacco product. A major way to address vaping among youth is to prohibit the sale of the flavored tobacco products that entices youth to first try tobacco products.

Additionally, this bill addresses the sale of menthol in e-cigarettes and cigarettes. Menthol also promotes tobacco use as it has a cooling and numbing effect and can reduce throat irritation from smoking. This make menthol flavors more appealing to youth who may initiate smoking. Mint and menthol flavored e-cigarettes are one of the most popular flavors among youth.

Ending the sale of flavored tobacco will also advance health equity as the tobacco industry has a history of marketing menthol cigarettes to youth and people of color. In Hawai'i, 78% of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island smokers use menthol cigarettes (Hawai'i BRFSS, 2008).

**We strongly support HB551 to prohibits the sale of flavored tobacco and the mislabelling of e-liquids as nicotine free.** This bill would help address the youth vaping epidemic and make tobacco products less attractive to children. Hawai'i can be a leader in addressing this epidemic and join the five other states that have enacted policies to end the sale of flavored tobacco products to some extent. Flavored tobacco products pose a significant public health threat, especially to our keiki. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue affecting youth in our communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Holly Kessler  
Executive Director