

Testimony of Josephine Shapiro, 18, High School Student from Seattle, Washington
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U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
June 12, 2024

Testimony:

Hi, my name is Josephine Shapiro. I'm a high school senior from Seattle, Washington, and I'm addicted to nicotine because of e-cigarettes.

I grew up hating cigarettes and other commercial tobacco products. I would cough as I walked by smokers, trying to alert them to the harm that they're doing to their bodies. I never thought I would touch a cigarette or any other tobacco product.

As early as middle school, this started to change. My friends started vaping in seventh grade. They thought vapes were harmless because of the fun flavors and colorful packaging. They wanted to be cool like the pretty girls they saw vaping on social media, but they didn't realize they were becoming addicted.

Vaping soon started to take over their lives. They would leave class early to vape in the bathrooms or anywhere else they could get away with it. It's easy to hide these products in your sock or your bra, which makes it difficult for teachers or parents to know when kids are vaping.

In ninth grade, I began to hang out with a new group, who used all sorts of flavored e-cigarettes. The more I hung out with these people, the more vaping became normal to me, and I had to try it. The first flavor I tried was blueberry ice, but I tried pretty much every flavor my friends had.

I thought I was just enjoying the flavors, but soon my 14-year-old brain craved the nicotine more and more. I promised myself I wouldn't buy my own vape, because I wasn't addicted if I was just hitting it with my friends, right? It wasn't long before I broke that promise to myself. I was already addicted, and little did I know it was about to get worse.

These products are easy to get. You can ask someone older to buy it for you, buy it off a friend or just go to a store where they don't ID.

Once I had my own vape, I would leave class to vape in the bathroom with friends. I would get invited to lunch so people could hit my vape. All of a sudden, my entire circle was centered around vaping.

The hold nicotine had on my young mind was intense and scary. I felt completely out of control, helpless, and alone — even though I know I wasn't alone. Vaping affected my mood, my ability to catch my breath, and even my skin. I couldn't spend quality time with

my friends without thinking about when we were going to get their next hit, and I really miss the times when we could have fun without the presence of nicotine.

One of the saddest things about vaping and nicotine addiction is how it ruins relationships between friends and families. I can't tell you how many ways it's impacted my friends. But let me tell you one example.

One of my friends was so addicted, she would say things like "I'll just die at 20, whatever." I watched her isolate herself from the rest of her life, but as long as she had a vape, she said she was okay. Vaping for her was not just an addiction, it was her lifeline. We would skip class and activities to sit in her car and vape. Then the vapes turned into cigarettes. And then the cigarettes turned into other drugs.

My story is still ongoing today. Our story is still ongoing.

As I look forward to all the wonderful things I have ahead of me, I'm still struggling to get over my nicotine addiction. And I blame it all on the blueberry ice vape.

I've tried to quit vaping over and over again, but it is really, really hard.

Everything in my life is a trigger — hanging out with friends, driving my car, going to the bathroom, going into a convenience store — all of it makes me want to vape.

Honestly, I haven't been able to stay clean for more than two months since I decided to quit. I feel terrible about it. My addiction consumes a lot of my life. It has impacts on my physical and mental health. It makes me feel like I am less than. But the reality is that my ambition and goals have been suppressed by an industry that profits from me and my peers.

That's why I am sharing my story and doing everything I can to prevent young people from ever starting to vape or use any tobacco product. My story is mine, but I also tell it to protect the new generations. I have two younger siblings and imagining them with a blueberry ice vape breaks my heart. There are over 2 million kids who vape in the U.S., and millions more will go through the same thing if we do nothing.

From my perspective, we have to get rid of every single flavored e-cigarette. Until then, kids will continue to use these products and they will continue to get addicted just like me.

Thank you.