

October 15, 2019

Dear Mayor and City Council Members:

The Columbia/Boone County Board of Health received an update on the emerging public health threat of “vaping,” the use of electronic devices to inhale nicotine and other chemicals, at our regular meeting on October 10. After study and discussion, we voted unanimously to request your permission to draft a proposed ordinance that would further restrict access to these products in Columbia. We also hereby request that the Council place an immediate moratorium on the sale of all flavored e-cigarette products within Columbia city limits until such an ordinance can be finalized.

The basis for this request is two-fold: the recent dramatic rise in vaping by youth, who are attracted by candy, fruit, and mint/menthol flavors, start vaping, and consequently become addicted to nicotine; and the ongoing nationwide outbreak of lung injury associated with e-cigarette use.

The 2018 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS) found that in the single year between 2017 and 2018, use of e-cigarettes rose 78% among high school students and 48% among middle school students. Preliminary 2019 NYTS data show another large increase and estimate that more than a quarter of high school students are current e-cigarette users. Fruit, menthol/mint and candy are by far the most popular flavors among youth. While we do not have local survey data, anecdotal evidence indicates e-cigarettes are in common use by youth here, even in our public schools. The devices are small, easy to hide, and can be inhaled in seconds. They are advertised openly and on social media. Many parents don’t even recognize what they are.

Even more concerning is the ongoing outbreak of serious lung injury that has affected 1,080 people as of October 8 (median age 23 years), with 23 deaths (the youngest 17 years old). The numbers continue to rise and the victims will probably have permanent lung damage. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is investigating the cause, but that task is made very difficult by the fact that the ingredients in vaping liquids, even those sold commercially, are completely unregulated. Only the manufacturers know what chemicals they contain, and no one knows how inhaling those chemicals affects human health.

Several states and many local governments have implemented restrictions on flavored products, and the federal government has announced the intent to ban all non-tobacco e-cigarette flavors. However, it is not clear how and when that will take place.

Locally, the passage of local Tobacco 21 and Tobacco Retail Licensure ordinances are significant steps toward restricting youth access, as is the appropriation of funds for a part-time enforcement officer. However, the epidemics of youth vaping and serious lung injuries from vaping are moving very quickly and require a more urgent response. We therefore request a

local moratorium on the sale of flavored vaping products and permission to draft an ordinance to address this emerging public health threat.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mahree Fuller Skala". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mahree Fuller Skala
Chair, Columbia/Boone County Board of Health