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March 8, 2016

Sen. Michael J. McCaffrey
Senate Committee on Judiciary
State of Rhode Island General Assembly

Dear Sen. McCaffrey:

I am a public health physician who advises the R Street Institute on tobacco-related policy. Detail on my background and how I arrived at my position on the issue of e-cigarettes is provided in the FDLI article attached to this note.

S. 2107, as currently proposed, requires the posting of signs related to the harms of cigarettes and e-cigarettes. I commend your committee on your interest in reducing tobacco-related addiction, illness and death and your focus on children in doing so. Unfortunately, S.2107, as drafted, is technically inaccurate, and if passed as proposed, is likely to do more harm than good.

People smoke for the nicotine, but die from the tar. Experience to date shows cigarettes to be the most addictive and hazardous nicotine product. E-cigarettes and related vapor devices have no tobacco, no combustion and no tar. They contain nicotine extracted from tobacco, but only the tiniest traces of the toxins so prevalent in cigarette smoke. They are almost entirely used by teen and adult smokers to wean themselves off cigarettes.

While some of the advertising of the mass-market e-cigarettes has induced some non-smoking teens to experiment with them, very few have continued e-cigarette use and few, if any, have later transitioned to cigarettes. Data on the chemical composition of e-cigarette vapor (it is not smoke) strongly suggest it poses less than 1 percent of the risk of cigarettes and significantly less potential for addictiveness.

The data on cigarette-related addiction, illness and death actually justifies a much stronger warning than the one proposed in S. 2107. Alleging that e-cigarettes present the same risk as cigarettes is simply not true.

I therefore urge both the deletion of any reference to e-cigarettes in S. 2107, and the drafting of an even stronger anti-cigarette warning.

Yours sincerely,

Joel L. Nitzkin, M.D., MPH, DPA
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