



## School Administrators Alliance

*Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children*

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**TO:** Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety  
**FROM:** John Forester, Executive Director  
**DATE:** September 9, 2021  
**RE:** Support for Senate Bill 355

Chairman Wanggaard and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety, thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important legislation. My name is John Forester. I'm the Executive Director of the Wisconsin School Administrators Alliance (SAA). In that capacity, I represent the combined memberships of five professional associations of public school administrators: the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA), the Wisconsin Association of School Business Officials (WASBO), the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA), the Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators (WASPA), and the Wisconsin Council for Administrators of Special Services (WCASS). The SAA also represents the 10,000 members of the Wisconsin Retired Educators Association (WREA).

The SAA, and WREA, supports Senate Bill 355, relating to raising the legal minimum sales age for tobacco products from 18 to 21. I would like to begin by thanking Senator Marklein and Representative Spiros for bringing this legislation forward. Please consider the following in support of our position:

- Wisconsin schools are in the front lines in dealing with fallout from rising teen nicotine addiction.
- As e-cigarettes and vaping products have become more widely available, we have seen an explosion in the numbers of young people using these products.
- According to the most recent Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 2019, e-cigarette use among high school students was at 20.6%. Further, 45.5% of all Wisconsin high schoolers report having tried an e-cigarette at least once.
- Eighteen-year-olds are suppliers of these products to their younger peers. Raising the minimum sales age will reduce the number of high schoolers who can legally purchase these products for others in their social circles.
- Just like raising the legal drinking age from 18 to 21 helped remove alcohol from high school campuses, we hope this bill will produce similar results when it comes to e-

cigarettes and other dangerous products that harm the health of young students and disrupts learning environments in schools.

- In 2019, Congress passed, and President Trump signed into law, an increase in the minimum federal sales age to 21. However, we need to increase Wisconsin's minimum sales age to ensure compliance with federal law and to provide Wisconsin law enforcement with the authority to enforce the new federal policy. The current confusion surrounding the legal purchasing age in Wisconsin, as well as confusion over enforcement of the federal purchasing age law, allows youth continued access to tobacco products.

While the SAA, and WREA, strongly supports raising the legal minimum sales age for tobacco products from 18 to 21, we have two concerns about the bill:

- The current definition of "vapor products", as referenced in the bill, does not include all liquids and other substances used in vape devices, potentially making enforcement a challenge. We urge the Committee to support a more comprehensive definition.
- Current state statutes punish tobacco users instead of the retailers and it could lead to enforcement action against low-income youth and youth of color disproportionately.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you should have any questions regarding our thoughts on SB 355, please call me at 608-242-1370.