



School Administrators Alliance

Representing the Interests of Wisconsin School Children

TO: Assembly Committee on Substance Abuse and Prevention
FROM: John Forester, Executive Director
DATE: September 30, 2021
RE: Support for Assembly Bill 348

Chairman James and members of the Assembly Committee on Substance Abuse and Prevention, 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 Assembly Bill 348, relating to raising the legal minimum sales age for cigarettes, tobacco products, or nicotine 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. School administrators get into the education profession to help students learn and affect the education of our youth. Unfortunately, they are spending way too much time tackling the vaping problem when they could be devoting that time to improvements in instruction and boosting educational performance for all students.

- 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.
- We also strongly support Assembly Amendment 1 to AB 348, which replaces all of the references to "vapor product" within the bill with the term "electronic smoking device." If adopted, this definition of "electronic smoking device" would significantly strengthen the bill and clarify enforcement of its provisions should it become law. We urge the Committee to support Assembly Amendment 1.

While the SAA, and WREA, strongly supports raising the legal minimum sales age for cigarettes, tobacco products, or nicotine products from 18 to 21, we have one concern about the bill:

- 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 AB 348, please call me at 608-242-1370.