

May 20, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tim Kaine
United States Senate
231 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Senator Kaine:

On behalf of the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) and the undersigned osteopathic specialty affiliates, which represent more than 145,000 osteopathic physicians and osteopathic medical students, we write to express our support for the *Tobacco-Free Youth Act*. Your legislation would raise the nationwide minimum age to buy tobacco products, including vaping products, to 21. This change would support smoking prevention among a population that is particularly susceptible to addiction, whose brains are still developing, and among whom nicotine use can have long-term developmental harms.

In light of the long-term health problems that nicotine and tobacco use can have on teenagers, tobacco use trends among the younger generation are especially troubling. From 2017 to 2018, e-cigarette use by high school students increased by 78 percent, accounting for 3.05 million students. This trend is correlated with an overall increase in tobacco product use by high school students of 38 percent.ⁱ Increasing the age of sale for all tobacco products to 21 is an essential part of a comprehensive approach to curbing the epidemic of youth e-cigarette usage.

As osteopathic physicians who care for tobacco users each day and witness the toll these products take on their health, we welcome this policy change. In our efforts to partner with our patients to support their well-being, we frequently advise patients on the harms of tobacco use and support smokers in their cessation efforts. However, the strongest public health approach to decrease tobacco use nationwide is effectively preventing people from ever starting to use tobacco products. The *Tobacco-Free Youth Act*, which prohibits the sale of all tobacco products to people under the age of 21, is critical to this effort.

We appreciate your leadership on this important public health issue, and we look forward to working with you to secure enactment of the legislation.

American Osteopathic Association
American Academy of Osteopathy
American College of Osteopathic Emergency Physicians
American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians
American College of Osteopathic Internists
American College of Osteopathic Neurologists and Psychiatrists
American College of Osteopathic Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians
American College of Osteopathic Surgeons
American Osteopathic Academy of Addiction Medicine
American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics
American Osteopathic Academy of Sports Medicine
American Osteopathic College of Anesthesiologists
American Osteopathic College of Dermatology
American Osteopathic College of Radiology

ⁱ <https://www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/PublicHealthEducation/ProtectingKidsfromTobacco/ucm625887.htm>