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Testimony in support of SB 21 – Tobacco 21
Asim K. Jaffer, MD, FAAFP -Chair of the Board
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Dr. Asim Jaffer, board chair of the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians and a family physician at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Peoria. I was proud to help lead the successful drive for tobacco 21 policy in Peoria and I'm here in Springfield today to urge the General Assembly to make this important prevention policy statewide.

Family physicians are often the primary physicians for teenagers and young adults. In my hometown of Peoria, our family medicine residency clinic is a primary source of care for teens and particularly at-risk youth. They are still developing physically and emotionally, and more importantly, their brains are still developing as well. The U.S. Surgeon General has found that youth use of nicotine in any form, including e-cigarettes, is unsafe, can cause addiction and harm the developing adolescent brain, affecting attention and learning.

If we can guide them through the teens and into their 20s without a nicotine addiction, the data shows it's more likely they will never become tobacco users.

Tobacco 21 would also cover the purchasing of e-cigarettes, a product whose long-term health effects are currently undocumented. We do know that e-cigarettes have nicotine, harmful chemicals and toxins known to cause cancer and other ailments. Meanwhile e-cigarette use among youth is now an epidemic and a national emergency, as recognized by the U.S. Surgeon General. These manufacturers are targeting youth with tempting flavors and a false belief that their products are not harmful.

In fact, evidence shows that these e-cigarettes may lead teens to traditional cigarettes. A January 2018 report by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine concluded, "There is substantial evidence that e-cigarette use increases risk of ever using combustible tobacco cigarettes among youth and young adults."

Couple that fact with new data from the 2018 Youth Tobacco Survey. The percentage of students who reported vaping nicotine in the past 30 days increased this year by 90 percent among 12th graders up to 20.9 percent. Vaping among 10th graders essentially doubled from 8.2 to 16.1 percent. Even 8th graders reporting that they vaped in the past 30 days jumped from 3.5 to 6.1 percent. This all adds up to the single largest increase in the survey's 43-year history for any adolescent substance use outcome in the U.S. This is a runaway train and it's time we put policy in place to stop these products in their tracks.

The warning bells are ringing loudly, and we must answer now. We must block the direct path of retail sales of e-cigarettes, Juuls, smokeless tobacco and other nicotine products whose only goal is hooking our next generation. Those teens who are already using nicotine products will need our help to quit.

Many Illinois communities from Lake County, to Chicago, to Peoria to Bloomington have passed tobacco 21 policies. Every Illinois youth and young adult deserves the same protections from the industry influence. I thank Sen. Morrison and all the legislators who have supported this bill every year. Please pass this bill out of committee without delay. My family physician colleagues look forward to advocating with all their lawmakers that Tobacco 21 become the law of the land in Illinois. Thank you.