

February 08, 2023

House Committee on Labor & Government Operations

Hearing Time: 09:30 a.m.

Location: State Capitol

Re: HB 551, Relating to Health

Aloha e Chair Matayoshi, and members of the Committee:

We are writing in **strong support of** HB 551, Relating to Health.

This bill will prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco products and the mislabeling of e-liquids as nicotine free; authorize the department of health to appoint, commission, or contract for services of inspectors; establish two full-time equivalent program specialist positions and one full-time equivalent hearing officer position; and appropriate funds.

Research conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) shows that flavored tobacco products are widely considered as “starter” products, and people who use them are more likely to become addicted than someone trying non-flavored tobacco products for the first time. The usually sweet flavoring masks the harshness of the tobacco, which makes them more addictive and harder to quit. According to the CDC, **flavored tobacco is more addictive than regular tobacco products**.

Furthermore, youth and young adults used flavored tobacco products more than any other age group. More than four out of five young adults ages 18 to 24 who have ever used tobacco reported that their first product was flavored (truth initiative). Flavored tobacco can be considered a gateway substance and should be regulated as such.

Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth houselessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally-informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

**Please support HB 551.**