

**MR. AND MRS. STEVEN KOHN**  
13600 AQUA LANE, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850-3632  
(301) 424-5539

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Dear Senator Washington,

I am writing to you on behalf of PAVe (Parents Against Vaping E-cigarettes) and also as a small business owner (17 years have owned a home health agency in Rockville) to support SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition" and to extend our appreciation to the Committee for giving this issue the time and consideration it deserves. We encourage you to pass a clean bill that protects our children and communities from a toxic product that kills 7,500 people in Maryland each year and is actively hooking an entirely new generation of kids.

I have been asked to share with you the experience we've had with our son's use of flavored vaping products and the effect it has had on him ever since he started using the sweet tasting products in high school. Michael is currently a junior student athlete, division 1 baseball player at a university in Connecticut near New York City but his journey with vaping and nicotine addiction began junior year of high school. I urge the state of Maryland and every other state for that matter to ban the sale of these intoxicating, flavored vaping products. As a business owner, I understand how these "vaping shops" wish to remain in business and do not want the interference of the government in their businesses. However, I believe we have to draw the line when it comes to the health of our fellow Marylanders, especially our youth who are being sucked into this addiction with sweet smelling and tasting substances that do nothing but harm them and addict them to nicotine in some cases for years. It has to stop.

As a college freshman in 2018, Michael entered his college locker room with the anticipation and excitement of what his career as a collegiate baseball player might be. Unbeknownst to him (and us and the other parents of these players) was that the entire team (save for 2 or 3 players out of 32) was regularly using JUUL brand devices with the various flavored pods. They smoked in the locker room, in between classes, in their dorms, and to my horror they SMOKED IN THE DUGOUT DURING BASEBALL GAMES and PRACTICES! As a freshman and wanting to "fit in" (I suppose) my son gave in to the regular vaping sessions that apparently were common place with his teammates. He had already participated in vaping at parties in high school which seemed to be extremely commonplace among his friends. However this new "team" atmosphere in college made it all the more appealing (I'm guessing) and his frequency of use ramped up and he quickly became hooked. He didn't bomb out of school or perform poorly on the team (luckily)... He actually had a decent first year of college, but when asked to quit we got nothing but "appeasement speak" (another way to say B.S.) from our son who would basically just lie to get us off his back. This was the first inkling of how strong this addiction to the purest form of nicotine in these JUUL pods can be because he was never usually very oppositional and has a pleasant, friendly personality....but these products changed that significantly. He also had a persistent cough while using the vaping products and he sometimes still does cough after exertion because of his compromised lungs.

We tried using a nicotine patch on him after he "agreed to quit" but again this was lip service. Even though he tried using the patch a couple times (complained of stomach pains and G.I. problems which we attributed to nicotine withdrawal---so that's why he agreed to try the patch) he apparently never stopped vaping. The patch is ineffective if the person wearing it doesn't really truly want to quit.... He continued to vape even while wearing the patch which we told him was just foolish. It actually INCREASED the amount of nicotine entering his system having a patch on and vaping!! This was just such a dumb

decision on his part. So at that time we were at a desperate crossroads with a kid who was about to enter his sophomore year of college and who claimed he didn't have a problem with JUULing. In his athletics he was poised to begin a potentially breakout baseball season in his sophomore year and yet didn't seem to want to stop vaping. My wife is a medical professional (nurse practitioner) and we have studied the effects of nicotine addiction and are extremely concerned about his health and his potential for OTHER addictions which is certainly a possibility. The nicotine addiction is subtle yet extremely powerful for young people and it seems to help Michael deal with some underlying anxiety he has had as a freshman and just in general. But now it appears to have become a habit which I attribute to the strong appeal of the sweet taste of the various "flavors" that are available on the market and which appeal directly to young people. We have no idea how often he vaped in high school or as a freshman but he claims (could be lying again) that he has "cut back" significantly. It definitely affected his mood, his personality, he became angry very quickly without prompting, irritable for no reason, and often would leave the house during semester or summer break because he probably needed to go vape. It's something that is hard to verify except for the occasional devices and paraphernalia that we found in the car or in his room. But when he is away at college you cannot tell what is going on of course.

As news of people becoming gravely ill (and even dying) over vaping spread across the country, the baseball team began to discuss among themselves (according to my son) the idea of cutting back the vaping and trying **nicotine pouches**. This would avoid the inhaling of vapor and chemicals into the lungs but would still satisfy their craving and addiction to the nicotine. My son said he was using the pouches exclusively toward the end of last school year and during baseball season. He said by popping a pouch in his mouth it calmed him down and gave him the ability to focus better and do better as a batter at the plate during hitting. We know that we have been lied to by him and the other players throughout this situation. Addicts in general are generally good liars to protect their addiction and nicotine addiction is no different than any other addiction. We just took his words for face value at the time.

We can't really bring this up to his coach because the coach "dips" tobacco himself as do a couple of the assistance coaches which is fairly common in the baseball community unfortunately. So our concerns would likely fall on deaf ears, but in college you can't really NARC your kid out if you want him to remain on the team and still play ball. He would be shunned by the team. If we do it anonymously we doubt anything would happen. We believe that this problem is not isolated to this particular baseball team or this sport or this program. It's rampant across the country among boys and girls according to my son and his friends.

At the time, we were seriously considering pulling the rug out from under him (no college, no car, no baseball, no financial support whatsoever) unless he stopped 100%. Not sure how feasible that would have been or if the punishment appropriately would have met the crime in this case. We brought him to an allergist during semester break and it was determined that he had a few allergies to mold and other things and I brought up the topic of vaping to the doctor who positively insisted that it would be the WORST possible thing he could do for himself and his lungs. We rode his case and we think he finally got the message.

He got the flu over the fall and at the same time was having nicotine withdrawal because he wasn't able to vape. We got him a nicotine patch kit to use and that worked for a couple of days, then he became very ill from the patch and just didn't feel right. So he stopped using the patch and from this point on we think he has STOPPED vaping! At least he's been bragging to us about stopping and also to his two older brothers. This was all just before the COVID-19 pandemic broke out across the country.

Interestingly enough we heard Michael tell another young person, "Don't ever try it! Don't even get started!" when talking about vaping----he clearly understands it's wrong/harmful and we are hopeful that he has truly stopped using the devices. He continues to use the nicotine pouches and does not seem to

want to quit using them. He seems to like the stimulant effect that they give him and he thinks that they are relatively "safe" especially when compared to vaping products. We are not pleased. He is clearly addicted to nicotine and it is all because of his initial experience with vaping. His lungs had already become compromised from the JUULing when the pandemic hit. He tested positive for the COVID 19 virus after he went back to school in the fall of 2020 when many of his teammates got the virus. He came home at Thanksgiving having just quarantined 14 days after testing positive. You can imagine the horror we felt when we heard he had tested positive with already compromised lungs. He had some difficulty breathing and lost his sense of taste and smell, but fortunately for him, he had only a mild case...but even today which is several months later, his sense of taste is not 100 percent and when he exerts himself during strenuous exercise he often gets nauseous and vomits and has a hard time breathing. We put him on nebulizer treatments to calm down his lungs, which seemed to help, but there is obviously residual damage from the vaping he was doing back during high school and freshman year of college.

As a D1 athlete who is mostly concerned about beating out his teammates for playing time and becoming the best he can be at his craft so that maybe he could be drafted in professional baseball someday, we thought it would be a no brainer to stay away from harmful products like JUUL, but apparently "EVERYONE IS DOING IT!" Unfortunately, we believe this is true.

Thank you for taking time to hear our situation. We are hopeful and optimistic about the fact that he has truly stopped but we remain concerned for him and even for his friends and teammates. This week he heads back to school for second semester of his junior year and the beginning of baseball season which has been delayed to March because of COVID. We are fairly certain he will continue to use the pouches. I am not sure if he will ever use a vaping product again but I also know that he occasionally has smoked THC and/or marijuana because so many of the kids (and many adults) believe that it's no big deal...again, proof that vaping and nicotine use can become a gateway to the use of other recreational drugs. We realize how "LUCKY" we are with our son in that he hasn't bottomed out from the use of these products, however, it is still a concern and is something that he uses to "medicate" his anxiety. We appreciate your efforts to get these products (especially the flavored ones that attract young people) out of the hands of young people who just do not understand how addictive they are and how difficult it is to get off the product.

With Regards,

Steve Kohn  
(301) 529-1174 cell  
Stevenkohnmcm@aol.com