



St. Mary's County Public Schools
Central Administration

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BILL: Senate Bill 239 - St. Mary's County - Public and Nonpublic Schools - Prohibition on Possession of Tobacco Products by Minors
DATE: January 20, 2021
POSITION: **Support**
COMMITTEE: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
CONTACT: Dr. Scott Smith, Superintendent, St. Mary's County Public Schools

This bill prohibits an individual younger than age 21 from possessing a tobacco product or electronic smoking device (ESD) in St. Mary's County. The bill does not apply to certain individual who are acting as the agent of their employer within the scope of employment, or an active-duty member of the military who is at least age 18. A violation is a civil offense, and a minor who violates is subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.

Over the last decade, teen smoking was reaching historic lows and this new epidemic of vaping has taken school systems across the country by surprise. According to a 2018 study done by the University of Michigan, "High school seniors had the sharpest one-year increase, with more than 37 percent reporting vaping within the past 12 months – a jump from nearly 28 percent in 2017. Additionally, the percentage of 12th-graders who reported vaping in their lifetime rose to 42.5 percent from 35.8 percent in 2017."

Perhaps the most serious aspect of this epidemic is that the long-term effects of vaping on developing brains will not be known for decades. The dangers of nicotine, and it is even more concentrated in e-cigarettes than traditional cigarettes. However, in addition to nicotine, there are toxic chemical and metals in many e-cigarettes and there have been reported cases that vaping causes respiratory issue, cardiovascular problems and even seizures. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 66% of teens believed their e-cigarettes only contained flavoring and had no idea about all of the other harmful, and cancer-causing substances. The Institute has also discovered that about 30% of teens who start vaping progress to traditional smoking within six months.

St. Mary's County Public Schools are struggling to deal with this epidemic, but one thing is clear – we cannot solve this problem on our own. This legislation reflects a comprehensive approach that includes prevention, education, and discipline. We look forward to continuing our work with families, the health department, and law enforcement with this legislation.

For the reasons stated above, St. Mary's County Public Schools **supports Senate Bill 239** and urges a favorable committee report.