

Before the House Ways & Means Committee
House Bill 49 Opponent Testimony
Frank Cahall, AltSmoke
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Chairman Schaffer, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Member Rodgers and members of the House Ways & Means Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on as an opponent of portions of House Bill 49. My name is Frank Cahall and I appear before you today representing AltSmoke.

AltSmoke has nine vapor stores located throughout Ohio as well as in Kentucky. We employ roughly 77 Ohioans in good paying, full and part time jobs. All of our positions begin above minimum wage.

In the simplest of terms, if the Governor's proposed tax increase on tobacco, and specifically the inclusion of vapor products in the OTP tax, becomes law, you will be closing AltSmoke stores and will be sending our employees back to the unemployment line.

Vaping provides an alternative to traditional tobacco that our customers have sought out. Some supplement traditional cigarettes with vaping. Many are former smokers who credit these products with allowing them to break free of combustible tobacco products. With the current tax system, our customers have a choice on which product they use.

Vaping also is a very personal issue for me that I would like to share with you. Seven years ago on February 6th I sat with my Lung doctor. He reached across the desk and took my hand in his. "Frank this is very hard to tell you, but all the test results say you have a year to live..." On that day I weighed 480 pounds. My blood pressure was 205/165 on medication. My blood sugar was 300 despite of being on five medications. I had had pneumonia five times in the previous 12 months. I have severe Asthma and onset COPD. I left the doctor's office very depressed and had to sit my two children ages 16 and 14 down that night to tell them I was going to die.

I had been a smoker since age nine. On the day of the diagnosis I was smoking two packs of Kool Kings a day. I also smoked about seven premium cigars a week. I had tried to quit smoking at least 20 times from the age of 20 to 46 years old. But that day in the doctor's office told me I had to quit ASAP to try to save my life. That same day I went on Nicotine gum. In the two weeks I used it I started to develop issues with upset stomach, flushing and I started having massive pains in my stomach. A trip to the doctor and subsequent test left me with findings of a ulcer. At that point I switched to the nicotine patch. Within three weeks I started to react to the patch and ended up with a 3rd degree chemical burn on my left shoulder. Next was trying Chantix. Chantix was payed for by my company as part of their anti-smoking program. My wife is a pharmacist here in Ohio and begged me not to take it due to very adverse side effects. I decided I had to try it again her wishes. The first three weeks I thought I was having amazing results. I was so happy I did not crave any tobacco after 27 years. Then I started have suicidal thoughts. Super scary to have this happen. I was 46 years old and even in my darkest years I never had these thoughts. My wife and doctor had me go off if it right away.

So I went cold turkey. In the eight months of cold turkey I kept falling off the wagon whenever something stressful would happen in my life. On October 15th I thought I finally had my life long addiction beat. That night I was told that my sister was admitted to ICU and was not expected to make it. So I bought another pack. I managed for almost a month only smoking when I was stressed to the max with my sister progress or lack of progress. Even though I knew I was going to die I could not break my addiction. On November 13th of that year I was working in my office when I got that call all of us dread. Get to the hospital now she is not going to last the night. First thing I did after leaving my office at Walmart? I went to the cigarette check out and purchased a pack of Kools and a bic lighter. As I sat in my truck getting ready to lite a cigarette I had a major breakdown. My sister was dying. I was dying since I could not break my habit. My mother was going to have to burry two children within one year. At that time I had the courage to crush my pack and not light up. I drove to the nearest Walgreens. There I purchased a Blue e-cigarette pack.

November 13th was the last day I purchased any traditional tobacco. From the first toot on that Blue, I was satisfied for the first time since I was told I would not live a year.

Fast forward six years... I am still tobacco free. I've lost 180 pounds, I do not take any medications for diabetes or for high blood pressure. But more important I watched my children graduate from high school. I have watched my son graduate from Miami of Ohio and be accepted to Vanderbilt law school. In May I will watch my daughter graduate from Miami of Ohio to become an advocate rights lobbyist for gay rights.

A year after leaving traditional tobacco I opened my first AltSmoke store. I left a very good paying career at Walmart and took a half pay cut because I wanted to change people's lives like e-cigarettes changed mine. Though my AltSmoke stores, in the last four years we have helped tens of thousands of Ohioans leave traditional tobacco and get the new lease on life that I received by switching.

I urge you not to kill this industry by implementing the Governor's proposed tax. I am just one of countless people who with a story like this.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.