

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 3, 2020

The Honorable Robert Redfield
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
395 E. Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Director Redfield:

Based on new evidence demonstrating the link between adolescent tobacco use and COVID-19, we call on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to update its guidance to colleges and universities and encourage campuses to go tobacco-free—which would include e-cigarettes—for the fall semester.

Dr. Bonnie Halpern-Felsher of Stanford University recently released a seminal study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* showing in a national sample that young people aged 13 to 24 who vape are five times more likely than non-vapers to be diagnosed with COVID-19. Those individuals who have vaped and smoked combustible cigarettes in the last 30 days (dual users) are nearly seven times more likely than non-users to be diagnosed with COVID-19 and almost five times more likely to experience symptoms.¹

With some colleges reopening for on-campus learning in the fall semester, this new study on youth vaping must be taken into account. College-age tobacco users are at heightened risk of contracting the virus, and they will spread it. Young people are increasingly driving the spread of COVID-19, and that will only increase with reopened college campuses if appropriate public health precautions are not strictly implemented and enforced.²

Following the Stanford study, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) announced that it was banning tobacco use on campus in the fall, including smoking, vaping, and chewing tobacco. In making that decision, UNLV took into account that if someone is smoking, vaping, or chewing tobacco, they cannot be complying with requirements to wear a mask.³

¹ Gaiha, SM., Cheng, J., and Halpern-Felsher, B., *Association Between Youth Smoking, Electronic Cigarette Use and Coronavirus Disease 2019*, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (Aug. 11, 2020) (www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1054139X20303992).

² *Young People Are Increasingly Driving COVID-19's Spread*, *The Hill* (July 18, 2020) (online at <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/507905-young-people-are-increasingly-driving-covid-19s-spread>).

³ *UNLV Announces Tobacco-Free Campus For Fall Semester*, *Fox 5 Vegas* (Aug. 12, 2020) (online at www.fox5vegas.com/coronavirus/unlv-announces-tobacco-free-campus-for-fall-semester/article_531cec08-dd2c-11ea-af74-67cf8d71a98c.html).

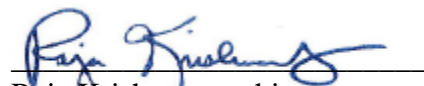
The CDC provides colleges and universities with guidance and considerations for safely reopening campuses in light of COVID-19.⁴ The CDC's advice for colleges and universities currently encourages them to "recommend and reinforce use of masks among students, faculty, and staff," explaining that "face coverings should be worn as feasible and are most essential in times when physical distancing is difficult."⁵ UNLV recognized that the CDC's advice is incompatible with tobacco use on campus.

In addition, now that Congress has raised the tobacco purchasing age to 21, the great majority of those on college campuses are already unable to legally purchase tobacco products.⁶

It is also worth noting that adolescent tobacco users are posing an outsized burden on coronavirus testing resources. The Stanford University-led study found that past 30-day dual users are nine times more likely to have been tested for COVID-19 than non-users, and those using e-cigarettes alone in the past 30 days are 2.6 times more likely to be tested.⁷ If we reduce the number of tobacco users, we will reduce the unnecessary stress we are putting on our testing system. People should not have to wait weeks for COVID-19 test results—removing the risk posed by adolescent tobacco use will help.

With the added public health risk posed by coronavirus, the CDC must act quickly and forcefully. For all of these reasons, we request that the CDC update its interim guidance and considerations for institutions of higher education to include recommendations for campuses to be tobacco-free in the fall. We request that you confirm, in writing, by September 9, 2020, whether CDC will take this important step.

Sincerely,



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic and
Consumer Policy
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate

cc: The Honorable Michael Cloud, Ranking Member

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Colleges, Universities, and Higher Learning* (July 31, 2020) (online at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/index.html).

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Considerations for Institutes of Higher Education* (May 30, 2020) (online at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/colleges-universities/considerations.html).

⁶ Food and Drug Administration, *Tobacco 21* (Feb. 12, 2020) (online at www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/retail-sales-tobacco-products/tobacco-21).

⁷ Gaiha, SM., Cheng, J., and Halpern-Felsher, B., *Association Between Youth Smoking, Electronic Cigarette Use and Coronavirus Disease 2019*, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (Aug. 11, 2020) (www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1054139X20303992).

Committee on Oversight and Reform