

My name is Amira Aderibigbe and I am a 17-year-old 12th grader who goes to West Warwick High school. The vaping epidemic has changed the trajectory of my high school career. I had grown up towards the beginning of stricter smoking regulations. There was never any smoking in the bathrooms, on planes, in restaurants, and never any smoking in stores. I cherished this time because up until this point it never occurred to me that life had ever really been like that at all. Smoking in bathrooms, and asking older students for cigarettes were only things that happened in movies, unrealistic to actual life. When I was in 7th grade there was a lull in activity during an English class. A single boy turned to the class and asked aloud, "What is your favorite vape flavor?" he proceeded to explain that his favorite was strawberry banana. At the time most of us were silent, there was a unanimous confusion amongst all the students. The only experience to vaping that we had was seeing Leonardo DiCaprio vape during the Oscars, and that was a big joke amongst the middle schoolers. Until 10th grade I never had to think about vaping again. It was not big at the time in middle school, juul was either not out or not as wildly popular as it is now. In 10th grade, my eyes were widened to the widespread effects of vaping. Students who I assumed would not even think about smoking cigarettes were vaping, good students who I thought made relatively good decisions. That year with full exposure to vaping and the mass spread fiasco juuling had become, I thought again about that moment in 7th grade. I realized that though there might have been confusion then, if those same students were asked once again "What their favorite vape flavor was" at least half the class would reply with a solid answer. A disgust grew in me, vape flavors had become previous generations gum flavors. They were traded, shared, recommended, and consumed. The implementation of vaping into my generations "culture" displays a full spectrum of unfairness to our young bodies and minds. The tobacco industry has made a mockery of our innocence and our statistically likely nicotine-free lives. It horrifies me to think that this mentality towards vaping and the flavors are possibly more popular in middle school than it was when I was younger. Sharing and trading flavors of products will always be kid-friendly, the vaping industry knows that and uses this to hook children and teens. The ban of flavors would prevent this generation of youth from treating vapes like bubble gum and I ask you to take action now.

Sincerely,
Amira Aderibigbe