

Bills Committee on Smoking, Public Health-Amendment Bill 2019
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, HKSAR

Dear Chairman,

**Re: Bills Committee: Regulate Alternative Tobacco Products Instead of Ban
Urging for a Proper Public Consultation**

I am writing not as an advocator of smoking, nor should this letter be seen as a way to promote smoking in any way. That being said, I am, like many in Hong Kong and across the world, a smoker, and have been since my youth. Since the Chief Executive's policy address outlining the banning of alternative tobacco products, there has been much debate by those who oppose and support the ban, with both sides, oftentimes citing various medical research papers and experiments. Although I have read through many of these papers, I am not a medical professional and am not qualified to comment; much of this information I believe has been examined by the council members already. Rather, what I present before you are my own experiences, however subjective that may be, and what I believe are my rights as a citizen.

I started smoking before I was legally allowed to purchase a pack of cigarettes. At the time, like many of my peers, we thought that smoking was something fun to do. I had thought to myself, "I can quit whenever I want", which as it turns out, is easier said than done. I have tried all the methods of quitting; I have half used boxes of nicotine gum and nicotine patches in various drawers throughout my house, remnants of half-finished smoking cessation medicine remain in my bags as a reminder of failed quitting attempts, and self-help books for quitting smoking continues to collect dust on my bookshelf. As I grow older, I become increasingly aware of the harm smoking causes to my body, from constantly coughing up phlegm, to losing breath when I run to catch a bus. I also become more increasingly conscientious of the second and third hand smoke and how it affects others around me, from feeling ashamed when passersby hold their breath walking through my cloud of second hand smoke, to affecting my wife when I come home and my clothes smell like I had walked into a burning building.

A little more than two years ago, a friend introduced me to a new alternative "heat-not-burn" tobacco product. Although skeptical at first, like many of those in the public unfamiliar with the product, I took my chances as it offered something with less smell and was marketed as a less harmful alternative to traditional tobacco. It did not take long for me to realize the wonders of this new device. After a week, I no longer had the craving of any traditional tobacco product. After a month, I no longer woke up with phlegm, my smokers cough was reduced to almost nothing, my clothes and mouth no longer smelled like an ashtray, and I no longer felt ashamed of affecting the people around me. I have been using heat-not-burn tobacco products ever since, and, having tried tasting cigarettes again after my conversion to heat-not-burn, I can whole heartedly assure those who have doubts that it is almost impossible to switch back to a traditional product.

Around a year after my change, I was blessed with news that I was going to be a parent. From that moment, I have worried constantly about the health of my child, and the environment he will grow up. As such, I have cut down drastically on the amount of heat-not-burn tobacco product I use, something I'm not sure I had the willpower to do with a traditional product. Although I continue to use heat-not-burn, mainly in situations with friends and alcohol, I never

have to worry about the smell that lingers on my body or my clothes. Even when I take my son out, I will walk away from anyone smoking, but I have less disdain for those who smoke heat-not-burn products.

As a parent, I understand the fears of the community that these devices may pose risks in attracting children to use them. However, I strongly urge the government to reconsider regulating heat-not-burn products rather than restricting them. Regulation in a manner similar to existing tobacco will vastly prevent the sale of such products to minors, whilst at the same time give consumers an option to switch to something, if not less harmful, then at least a less of a nuisance to others. Hong Kong is a unique city for which I have lived most of my life, and through all of its faults, it has always been a city driven by commerce and free markets. This oppressive and overbearing action taken by the government limits the choices we as citizens should be able to make as consumers.

Please reconsider.

Best Regards,
Janyu Tong

