

Support and Vote on House Bill 11

KAHPERD Executive Committee <kentuckyahperd@gmail.com>

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On behalf of the Kentucky Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance and our over 2,000 members from across the Commonwealth, I am writing to urge you to allow a floor vote on House Bill 11: Tobacco and Vapor Free Schools.

As Executive Director of KAHPERD, this issue is particularly important and personal to me in numerous ways. I was born and raised on a tobacco farm. My parents are both lifelong smokers who have attempted to numerous times to break the addiction without longterm success. I like many Kentuckians, have also buried a loved one due to cancer from the negative effects of tobacco use. This unfortunately is the norm for many Kentucky families, a norm that can and should change. Tobacco remains the leading preventable cause of disease and death from Kentuckians. The heritage of being a tobacco state is no excuse for doing what is right and what is best to protect Kentucky's students and communities. North Carolina understood that the costs outweigh the supposed "revenue", that is why they passed this same state wide policy in 2008.

In 2010, I had just started my job with the KY Department of Education. KDE's federal grant from CDC had specific funds for promoting tobacco free school local policy in our state. I was always puzzled why the federal government financially supported and issue that the state largely ignored. The original KY TFS map was in my office, it was card board printout and I used thumbtacks to mark the 16 school districts at the time. That funding ended in 2013, but KDE continued to support and work with state coalitions to promote passage of local TFS policy. The majority of the biggest school districts are all now covered, but now it's an equity issue. Now we need bold action and a state law to level the playing field for all schools and districts, students and parents deserve a consistent message about healthy norms.

I had a health educator once tell me that her students noticed one day when she accidentally wore a Nike sock and an Adidas sock. They not only noticed but they called her out for cross-branding her clothing. Another teacher once told me how he liked to model healthy behaviors for his students and would ride his bicycle to school on warmer days. One day he forgot his helmet and numerous students mentioned this inconsistency in healthy decision making to the teacher. As health educators in this state, inconsistent policy has a detrimental effect in many ways. Students are very aware of the inconsistencies of when we teach them one thing in class yet allow the exact opposite to happen in their school environment. 74 local school boards have passed this policy because they understand the importance of healthy behaviors and the role that schools play in setting those norms. It is time for the Kentucky General Assembly to do the same, House Bill 11 allows the KY General Assembly to send a clear and consistent message to all schools and all communities that their health matters and that tobacco and vapor products will no longer be an accepted norm for our students to witness.

Lastly, the vapor products issue has only just begun. The effects will continue to only get worse and harder to deal with. The school boards association and superintendents association both understand this, thus the reason they for the first time are endorsing this bill. They are asking for your help, help in sending the right message to all 173 school districts on this critical issue. Representative Massey is a long time local board of education chair in Kentucky and also served as President to the National School Boards Association, he has co-sponsored this bill. He of all people in the KY General Assembly has the most experience between local and state control, his sponsorship clearly indicates he understands the greater good and role of state legislation to support the best interests of local decision makers.

Let's do the right thing, let's start by laying the foundation for a healthier Commonwealth through a common sense policy that over 87% of Kentuckians support. A bill that has over 14 sponsors, passed its committee unanimously, has large support from numerous state wide coalitions including the KY Chamber of Commerce, at the very least deserves to be called for a vote on the floor of the House. Demonstrate what democracy is supposed to look like and stop delaying this bill from the Orders of the Day.

Sincerely,

Jamie Sparks, Executive Director
KY Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance

SHAPE America President-Elect