

Choose Your Fate...Don't Vape

Walking through a typical mall in Hawaii, one is likely to observe groups of children excitedly peering at brightly-colored storefront displays, an ukulele player strumming in the background as the aroma of buttered popcorn, freshly-baked cookies, and steaming hot pizza fill the air. However, outside the mall, one is also likely to encounter a different group of kids, this time hiding behind an overwhelming cloud of sickening, sweet-smelling vapor, a byproduct of an e-cigarette. Over the past few years, vaping among juveniles in Hawaii has skyrocketed to the point that Hawaii is now ranked second in the nation for e-cigarette use amongst children from grades six to twelve (Nakamura). In order to lessen the vaping epidemic that has so negatively affected Hawaii's keiki, it is imperative that our state collaborate with more established programs that are dedicated to the cessation of child vaping.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reports of youths experimenting with vaping devices has drastically increased to a staggering 48.3% of Hawaii's high school students and 30.6% of Hawaii middle schoolers ("Vaping Rises to Alarming Rates"). Due to its many enticing flavors and a reputation as a supposedly safer alternative to a traditional cigarette, many youths are unaware that vaping components actually contain numerous harmful ingredients, the most common being nicotine ("Quick Facts on the Risks of E-Cigarettes"). In addition to inhibiting brain function, nicotine is also highly addictive, and developing a dependence on it could lead to a higher risk of addiction to other nicotine-laced products, such as cigarettes, which are known to cause potentially fatal diseases like lung cancer and heart disease (Raven). If this problem is not addressed within the next fifty years, Hawaii could run the risk of

having a generation of young people fraught with the adverse health effects of nicotine-addiction.

Recently, Hawaii lawmakers have proposed multiple bills to try to eliminate the use of flavorings in vaping liquids, and make it legal for school staff to confiscate any e-cigarette paraphernalia floating amongst students (Nakamura). However, these proposals have failed to move forward, as many have questioned their overall effectiveness.

In order to stop the widespread vaping that threatens Hawaii's youth, our community should partner with National Jewish Health's "My Life, My Quit" program. Based in Colorado, and regarded as one of the most prestigious centers for the study of pulmonary diseases, National Jewish Health is working to bring awareness to the toll vaping can have on the health of young adults. Just last year, they launched a program called "My Life, My Quit," a confidential helpline that provides minors with resources to help overcome vaping addiction. Coaches educated in e-cigarette dependence provide information concerning the dangers of vaping and outline a plan of how to quit. A messaging system then provides words of encouragement as teens navigate vaping withdrawal. Currently, the program is being utilized in nineteen other states. However, if the "My Life, My Quit" program were to be brought to our state, this could have a profound impact on Hawaii teenagers who cannot simply escape the vape.

Clarence T.C. Ching was a public-spirited, charitable person who cared deeply for the well-being of those in his community. Through his foundation's multiple donations to establishments such as the Boys & Girls Club, Saint Louis School, and Kapiolani Community College, Mr. Ching clearly demonstrated a desire to aid the youth in his state. By supporting Hawaii's younger generation as they battle a prominent problem in the islands, each one of us can further Mr. Ching's legacy of improving our Ohana.

Following the selfless example modeled by Clarence T.C. Ching, we can strive to help Hawaii's juveniles overcome a growing dilemma in our society. By introducing new outreach associations to provide relief to the island's struggling adolescents, the state can work to eliminate these deadly hazes in our community to provide Hawaii's keiki with a clear, unclouded tomorrow.

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