

2019 Council Member for a Day Essay

Submit a video (of two minutes or less) or written essay (500 words or less) addressing the following:

- **What is the most important public issues facing young people today?**
- **What are your ideas for dealing with this issue?**
- **What suggestions do you have for national, state, & local leaders to address this issue?**

A public policy issue that drastically impacts today's youth is the use of vape paraphernalia by minors all across the country. According to the HealthDay Reporter, over 20% of high school students use electronic cigarettes! I've witnessed empty Juul pods littered about campus and cohorts who had the audacity to recharge their vape pens using school equipment. Speaking of audacity, a classmate was so bold as to Juul next to me on our way to a field trip! Upon confrontation, I was told it's merely "harmless flavored water vapor." If that's the case, why don't you inhale your juice? Do you really think that stuff belongs in your lungs?

The war on vaping has been declared an epidemic by healthcare professionals, and the national government is fighting back. The FDA's "The Real Cost" Campaign promotes the refusal of illegal substance intake -especially nicotine- through commercial advertising, primarily on platforms frequented by the adolescent demographic, including but not limited to: social media, music streaming services, and television commercials. They employ deterring facts and disturbing images to get their point across. But have they really reached today's teens? Or are they too busy floating on vape cloud nine?

Even though the national government is progressing, state legislature should fight this phenomenon too. States have the power to crack down on distribution centers and reinforce their policies against the prohibited sale of vape products to minors with legal action. Within the state of Maryland, retail or youth access of e-cigarettes is restricted. In addition, minors are prohibited from using or possessing electronic nicotine delivery systems, and "a license is required for shipment, manufacture, distribution, import or sale of electronic nicotine delivery systems into or within state." We're moving in the right direction, but there's more to be done.

Once upon a time at an assembly, I watched as a group of boys listened intently, mouths agape and brows sky-high as their ears rang with the repercussions of opioid abuse. Fear was imminent in their formative faces. They were definitely impacted by the knowledge imparted on them by all the guest speakers, videos, and firsthand accounts of the effects of drugs. Holding *more* assemblies could have similar effects on *more* students. However, I'm well aware that assemblies aren't the most exciting, so for those who aren't receptive to this approach there should be other options, like forums, where students can share their thoughts and be heard. These

are tasks for local governments, whose representatives have greater access to students. Taking advantage of this proximity means addressing the issue head-on.

All levels of government can address teen vaping by putting more of an emphasis on prevention in their daily lives. Whether it be through legislation, having conversations, creating safe spaces, or providing resources, we can lower the number of vaping teens one effort at a time. As the old adage says, it takes a village to raise a child. And it'll take significant action on Montgomery County's part to raise a generation of nicotine-free teens.

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