



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang
Consumers Association of Penang
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Press Release

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Enact the GEG law now and don't submit to tobacco industry lobby

We call on our parliamentarians to approve the Control of Smoking Product for Public Health (GEG) Bill 2023 without any more delay and enact it into law to check the vaping epidemic involving young school children aged 13 to 17.

There is no need for the bill to be sent to a parliamentary special committee, as speculated, because it had gone through that process during the previous 14th Parliament and sufficiently scrutinised and debated there. The current bill is the final product incorporating the committee's suggestions. We urge the parliamentarians to be responsible, placing the health of our young generation above the profits of the tobacco cartel and taxes for the government.

It has been reported in the media that some parliamentarians are opposed to the bill. The Sungai Buloh Member of Parliament Datuk R. Ramanan, while admitting smoking is dangerous to health, objects to the bill on the ground that "it would take away the right of the people to choose".

His objection is based on skewed logic and gross misunderstanding of the right to choose, which is not absolute. By his logic people should be given the right to choose whether to use drugs – cocaine, heroin, marijuana, amphetamines - or not. He must understand that restriction on individual's rights are dictated by health, security and moral concerns. If smoking is dangerous, as he admits, why is he opposing the proposed law that will, over a period, eliminate the danger?

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) "tobacco is the only legal consumer product that kills up to half of its users when used exactly as intended by the manufacturer".

Last week WHO director-general repudiated the tobacco industry claim that electronic cigarettes and vaping is part of harm reduction and warned that it's actually a trap. He said: "...kids are being recruited at [an] early age – 10, 11, 12 – to do vaping and e-cigarettes because they think that it's cool, because it comes in different colours, different flavours, and so on. Then, they get hooked for life. But e-cigarettes and vaping itself [are] also harmful."

Ramanan said that the government could lose a large portion of tax revenue from cigarette sales. Which is more important: people's health and saving lives or government tax revenue?

In any case, the government spending on treating tobacco and vape related diseases far exceeds the tax collected from tobacco products. The government may earn RM939 million in tax revenue in 2023. However, it has been estimated that it will cost Malaysia RM3 billion a year to treat just three of the major smoking-related diseases. It would cost a patient suffering from vaping-use-associated lung injury (EVALI) more than RM150,000 for just 12 days of treatment in hospital. It is clearly a case of penny-wise and pound-foolish.

We hope that our parliamentarians will not submit to the intense pressure from the tobacco industry lobby and enact the historic GEG law during the current parliamentary session.

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President
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