

BILL 46 (23)
Testimony

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To:

Honorable Tyler Dos Santon-Tam
City Council Representative District 6
Honolulu, Hawaii

Others I have sent this to
Include the Major and all City Council Members

Dear Councilman

I live in your district.

I am the President of Hawaiian Royal Trading Company; I have a total of almost 40 years in business here in Hawaii. I am now a disabled Veteran and would not like to see my business closed because of some confusion that we appeal to children.

I am writing this letter about Bill 46, a proposal that would ban the legal sale of menthol cigarettes and flavored tobacco through licensed, regulated stores to adults 21 and older. I am hoping you will vote against this.

Please don't lump us all together cigarettes, cigars, and vapes, they are all different.

I market cigars under the brand Hula Girl Cigars, Volcano Cigars, and the Maui Cigar Company. We are the largest cigar dealer in the State of Hawaii. In past years we have grown tobacco in Kula, Maui; and we import, distribute, wholesale, and retail cigars since 1997. We import almost 1,000,00 cigars a year. Almost 99% of them are taken out of state.

We do not target the youth market.

We manufacture all sizes, flavors, and shapes of cigars; they retail from \$2.00 to over \$50.00. We make over 10 different flavors including the world-famous Hula Girl Kona Coffee Flavored cigar. Our Volcano Brand of Macadamia nut flavored cigars are a popular visitor industry gift. We currently ship these cigars to all 50 states and many foreign countries. We do not target the youth market with our Hawaiian Flavored cigars; our customers are adult smokers who want a chance to enjoy a new and unusual taste, much the same as flavored coffees. The average age of our retail customer is 42. We have over 20,000 customers worldwide that order from our web site. We do not take orders from Hawaii residents. All our customers are age verified.

Our local customers include Duty Free International, ABC stores, Blind Vendors, US Military Bases, ship at sea and hundreds of small and large gift and tobacco shops throughout the Islands. 1000s of people depend on our products for their income.

There are less than 10 Cigar stores left in Hawaii. They all are very mindful not to sell Cigars to underage age people and most of them do not sell vapes or blunts or anything that targets youth.

At our previous farm locations in Kula, Maui we grew tobacco that was dried, aged, and exported for use in cigars that are hand rolled in the Philippines and shipped back to the US or direct to our foreign customers.

I do not support the proposed ban on FLAVORED TOBACCO

The State passed a new law this year that puts vapes in the same category as cigars. What a mess now that cigars are associated with vapes. These are different customers. Our cigars are usually purchased as a gift item to take back home for friends and family where they are traditionally enjoyed in a relaxing atmosphere. This tradition has existed since our country was founded in 1620. Without tobacco the USA would not be here.

We do not support vaping.

Vaping is a much different product and purchased by a totally different customer than a cigar. A cigar smoker is not a cigarette or vape user. We don't use chemicals in our products, just natural tobacco, and natural flavors. I can speak from my own experience that after my first cigar 50 years ago I gave up cigarettes. I enjoy a good cigar once a week after dinner in a relaxing social situation. I've never tried vaping. We are responsible businesspeople who sell adult products to adults.

This proposed bill would put us out of business.

We source our raw material worldwide and have a two- or three-year lead time. This proposed legislation would bankrupt us. Our cigars are available at resort shops throughout the Islands and not generally available at small local gas stations or stores. Our marketing efforts are focused on the tourist customer. We do not design our product or flavors for the youth market anywhere. Over the years we have sold millions of cigars and I have never heard from any of our retail store customers about any attempt by a minor to purchase our products. 99% of our cigars are sold to visitors who take them home.

Thank you, Aloha, for this opportunity to offer testimony.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'FR' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Fred Robinson
President
Hawaiian Royal Trading Company
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