

P-04-601 Proposed Ban on the Use of e-cigarettes in Public Places – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 13.02.15

William Powell AM
Assembly Member for Mid & West Wales
Chair Petitions Committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Dear Mr Powell,

I would like to thank you and the Petitions Committee for continuing to keep myself and my colleagues at the Save E-cigs campaign informed as to the progress of our petition against the proposed ban on vaping in enclosed public places.

We would like to put on record our extreme disappointment regarding the Health Minister's response to your Committee's latest letter. It is dismissive at best and fails to tackle any of the substantive points raised by Save E-cigs or your Committee.

We remain deeply concerned that Mr Drakeford and his officials are pushing ahead with this proposal without regard to the evidence. This is in stark contrast to the Scottish Government who, like the Welsh Government, also proposed a ban on vaping in enclosed public places. The Scottish Government chose to engage with the vaping community from the outset of their consultation process including the holding of at least one round-table meeting. Having listened to all the evidence, we have been informed that the Scottish Government will not now be pursuing their proposal to ban vaping in enclosed public places.

You may also be aware that there has been a debate taking place in Westminster as to whether or not MPs, Peers, staff, and visitors can vape in the Palace of Westminster. The initial view, reported in the press, was that vaping should be banned. However, like the Scottish Government, they chose to engage with interested parties on all sides of this debate and agreed to allow vaping. Vaping is now allowed in dedicated areas in Portcullis House, offices, and the Stranger's bar (the main bar in the Palace of Westminster).

We would also like to bring to your committee's attention a debate that took place in the House of Lords on e-cigarettes. During this debate the Health Minister The Earl Howe said, "The levels of toxicants in e-cigarette vapour were very much lower than those found in

conventional cigarette smoke and not considered to pose any significant passive inhalation risk.”

It is extremely disappointing, not to mention rather worrying, that Mr Drakeford refuses time and time again to engage with the evidence. In all the letters that both your committee and Save E-cigs has sent him he has not once engaged with the independent expert evidence that we have provided. Perhaps this is because it does not suit his agenda? More importantly, we feel that Mr Drakeford’s conduct to date reflects badly on the Welsh Government when compared to the examples highlighted above from Scotland and Westminster. This should be of concern to all those with an interest in Welsh politics.

The one body that Mr Drakeford continues to quote as supporting his proposed ban on vaping in enclosed public places is the World Health Organisation. Interestingly the Scottish Government, the Department of Health in England, and the Palace of Westminster authorities chose to discount the WHO’s advice on public vaping. On the subject of the WHO we would like to draw your committee’s attention to a significant intervention from Robert West, Professor of health psychology and director of tobacco studies at University College London’s department of epidemiology and public health, in relation to the WHO’s advice relating to e-cigarettes. He said, and I quote, that it was “a shocking piece of deception” and that “Someone at the top in the organisation needs to get a grip on this.”

As your committee will be aware, we have met with AMs from right across the political spectrum to discuss our concerns regarding this issue and have found all of them supportive of these concerns and in total agreement with our viewpoints. This has included meetings with Kirsty Williams, Elin Jones, and Darren Millar – all of whom are responsible for health issues within their respective parties.

No doubt when your committee meets there will be pressure to close our petition. We feel strongly that this would be the wrong thing to do. Whilst Mark Drakeford continues to demonstrate a failure to engage with the actual evidence, we feel that it is your committee’s duty to pursue this issue.

Each and every time we communicate with your committee we are able to provide you with fresh and independent evidence in support of our petition. When faced with the arguments from both sides of this debate the Scottish Government chose not to pursue a ban on public vaping. When faced with the arguments from both sides of this debate the Westminster authorities chose not to ban vaping. When faced with the arguments from both sides of this debate the UK Government concluded that passive vaping did not pose a significant risk. This

is in stark contrast to the Welsh Government who has chosen not to fully engage with the vaping community or the significant amount of evidence that has been provided.

The Petitions Committee must therefore continue to pursue our petition. If not Mark Drakeford will have essentially been allowed to simply ignore the views of the 1,196 vapers who signed our petition. The petitions process was designed to give the Welsh electorate a voice and a platform to raise their concerns. Whilst we cannot expect Mark Drakeford to agree with everything we say, we can at the very least, expect him to engage with us and your committee in a constructive manner. If Mark Drakeford is simply allowed to dismiss our petition and the extensive evidence that we have provided then we are left with little option but to ask what is the point of this committee?

Finally, I would like to bring to your attention the fact that Professor Linda Bauld (University of Stirling, UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies (UKTAS) and Cancer Research UK) will be addressing a breakfast meeting for AMs on the 25th of March 2015. She will be speaking specifically on the topic of e-cigarettes. Professor Linda Bauld is one of the key advisers to the aforementioned Scottish Government consultation. As a campaign we would urge all members of your committee (and indeed all AMs) to attend this important meeting as it will be a wonderful opportunity to hear from a leading authority on the subject of e-cigarettes.

Yours sincerely

Simon Thurlow

On behalf of the Save E-cigs Campaign