

ATTACHMENT A

City of Oneida Speech 5/19

Good evening, everyone, and thank you for allowing me to speak today. My name is Samantha Dartt and I am the Community Engagement Coordinator for BRiDGES Tobacco Control Program. As part of our work towards building and supporting healthy communities, our program hosted a Community Conversation focused on tobacco related issues on April 2nd at the Oneida YMCA that was open to all Madison County residents.

The purpose of the conversation was to hear directly from residents about what they are seeing in their schools, neighborhoods, and public spaces, and to better understand what community members are really seeing in their communities every day.

I wanted to briefly share some of the feedback we gathered during this community conversation which primarily focused on youth vaping and community concerns around tobacco retail access.

One of the biggest themes throughout the discussion was how normalized vaping has become for youth. Residents shared concerns about students vaping in school bathrooms and public outdoor and indoor spaces throughout the community. Some participants discussed students in the Oneida School District avoiding school bathrooms entirely because of how common vaping has become there.

Community members also discussed how exposure starts early. Participants of the community conversation talked about youth seeing vaping at home, in stores, online, and among peers, which contributes to the idea that it's normal or harmless.

Another major topic that came up was access.

Residents repeatedly brought up concerns about the number of retailers selling tobacco and vape products throughout the area and how visible these products are to young people. Participants specifically mentioned convenience stores, delis, and other locations where youth regularly stop for snacks or drinks. One person described feeling like tobacco products were everywhere they went.

During the conversation, someone asked:

“Why are we treating alcohol differently from tobacco, why is selling tobacco to kids just a fine?”

That comment led into a broader discussion around enforcement and accountability. Community members questioned whether illegal tobacco sales are taken seriously enough and whether there should be stronger consequences for repeated violations.

A large portion of the discussion focused on retail policies and the retail environment itself.

The conversation naturally shifted toward questions like:

How many retailers does a community actually need?

What impact does constant visibility have on normalization?

And how does easy access affect youth exposure?

Several participants asked why communities often do not have stronger local policies related to tobacco retailer density or licensing. I'm here today to share examples of approaches other communities have explored in response to similar concerns. When the Village of Dolgeville and the Village of Ilion both in Herkimer County faced concerns in their communities, primarily around youth access to purchasing vape devices in their communities, these villages explored policy options that helped protect youth against advertising and access to these products.

The Village of Dolgeville in 2019 established a retail licensing law and retail cap which allowed only the existing 3 tobacco retailers in the Village to apply for a local license and renew that license yearly, meaning no local licenses would be granted to new tobacco retailers if they were to apply in the Village of Dolgeville. If the existing 3 retailers in Dolgeville stores were to sell or move their business, their license to sell tobacco/nicotine products would be void. They also cannot accept coupons, discounts or promotions on tobacco products, and cannot sell tobacco products near a school or youth area.

The Village of Ilion just in November of last year established a tobacco retail licensing law that required all tobacco retailers to apply for a certificate directly through the Village, allowing the Village the option to deny renewal or a new certificate to retailers who have had their shop shut down or fined for selling illegal products or selling tobacco products to minors. The Village of Ilion's local law also prohibited retailers from selling near schools and neighborhoods, requiring all retailers to sell within a business zone. Within this law also included prohibiting flashy light displays and advertisements outside of the store, reducing youth exposure to tobacco marketing.

Communities across New York have used a variety of approaches, including retailer licensing, zoning considerations, and retailer density discussions, to address concerns related to youth exposure and access. These are all examples of strategies some municipalities have considered when discussing youth exposure and access as more products from Big Tobacco that are becoming easier to hide, such as nicotine pouches, enter our communities.

One quote that I think really summarizes the community conversation was:

"We often treat the symptoms but not the cause."

Overall, community members made it clear that residents are concerned not only about youth vaping itself, but also about the broader environment surrounding it, including access, visibility, normalization, and enforcement.

Our team is always happy to have further discussions and provide one on one assistance to the City of Oneida. Thank you again for the opportunity to share these findings today, and I appreciate your time.