



North Carolina Tobacco 21 Retail Licensing Campaign

For more information about the NC Tobacco 21, visit our website: <https://ncpha.com/t21/> or contact our Campaign Director, Meg.T21@ncapha.org

North Carolina's Nicotine Policy

- North Carolina is one of just three states without a retail licensing requirement for nicotine or vape products **and** has not aligned with the federal minimum sales age of 21, making it difficult to track how many retailers operate statewide. *(For comparison: you need a license to sell turtles in North Carolina!)*

Youth Vaping in North Carolina

- 21.4% of North Carolina high school students report vaping, double the national average.
- States with stronger enforcement and retail licensing laws have seen declines in youth vaping, while North Carolina's rates remain significantly higher.

What's Actually in Vapes?

- Anywhere from 20-90 cigarettes' worth of nicotine along with synthetic, lab-manufactured ingredients, and toxic chemicals.
- Devices often contain lithium batteries that pose fire and explosion risks and require special disposal, leading, in some cases, to stockpiles accumulating in warehouses and schools.

Safety and Regulation Gaps

- Without a retail licensing system, law enforcement cannot conduct routine inspections of vape shops without a complaint and warrant.
- North Carolina's Vape Registry law helps identify products on the market but does not regulate age-of-sale enforcement or retailer licensing.

Proposed Legislation: "Solly's Law" (H430 / S318)

This legislation would:

- Raise the tobacco and nicotine sales age to 21
- Require retailer licensing
- Strengthen enforcement authority for inspections and penalties
- Align North Carolina with national best practices to reduce youth nicotine addiction

Why Does this Matter?

The brain continues developing into the mid-20s. Nicotine exposure during adolescence can harm the prefrontal cortex, which controls decision-making and impulse regulation.

While federal Tobacco 21 passed in 2019, state-level enforcement is essential. North Carolina currently lacks the infrastructure to effectively enforce the law, this legislation fills that gap.

The bill covers traditional tobacco products and newer nicotine products to include:

- Vapor products and e-liquids
- Synthetic nicotine
- Flavored oral pouches
- Cigars and cigarillos

This ensures modern nicotine products are fully regulated.

Frequently Asked Questions?

“This will hurt small retailers.” The bill actually protects responsible retailers, it gives them a clear affirmative defense if they check ID in good faith, and the \$400 permit fee is modest compared to ABC permit costs they already manage.

“Doesn’t Federal law already cover this?” Federal Tobacco 21 exists, but enforcement depends entirely on state infrastructure. Without a permit system, there’s no mechanism to hold NC retailers accountable. Which means vape shops continue to open, sell illegal products, and target our youth without any regulation. This bill gives the law teeth.

“Why 21 and not 18?” Neuroscience is clear that the brain continues developing until the mid-20s. Additionally, raising the age to 21 helps break the social pipeline where older high school students purchase for younger ones.

“Shouldn’t we give military exemption to people who fight for their country?” Federal law is 21 and military bases follow federal law.

“Didn’t the Vapor Registry fix this?” The Registry and Solly’s Law do different things. The Registry can pull foreign vapes off the shelves but doesn’t address age or other nicotine products. Solly’s Law stops underage sales for all nicotine products.

