

Dear Members of the Judiciary and Legislation Committee of the Milwaukee Common Council,

My name is Taffie Foster-Toney and I'm the co-chair of the Wisconsin Tobacco Prevention & Poverty Network's Health Equity and Social Justice Subcommittee. I'm writing today to express my concerns with the possibility of new Cigar Bars opening in Milwaukee and across our state. While we have seen many gains recently in reducing harms from the tobacco environment, notably the Zoning Ordinance that prevents new Vape and Smoke shops from opening near schools and other youth-serving organizations or near existing tobacco retailers, this bill could reverse much of the progress that has been gained since Wisconsin implemented a smoke-free indoor air law by creating an exploitable loophole that could bring tobacco back into bars.

One of the major problems is that this policy is not easily enforceable. The state would have to create new procedures to track the location and revenue of tobacco bars. This would be logistically difficult and expensive for taxpayers. In addition, Wisconsin has not conducted compliance checks around indoor smoking in public spaces in 13 years because the law is self-enforcing and allows few exceptions for indoor smoking. The proposed change complicates the law, would require training for law enforcement, and would cost taxpayers.

Allowing for these types of establishments is also a major health equity and social justice issue, as Black and Brown communities have historically been more greatly exposed to tobacco in both public and private settings. This exposure has led to higher smoking rates, higher rates of exposure to secondhand smoke, higher exposure to tobacco advertising and subsequently major health disparities related to tobacco.

Encouraging cigar smoking in our community also sends the wrong message to our youth. A recent study estimated 500,000 U.S. students used cigars in 2022, making them the second most popular tobacco product among youth. Young people who start using tobacco products are more likely to become addicted than adults. In closing, Cigar Bars would harm our communities and is a step in the wrong direction.

Sincerely,

Taffie Foster-Toney, Co-Chair of the WTPPN Health Equity & Social Justice Subcommittee