



Deputation Presentation to: City of Toronto, Licensing and Standards Committee

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Deputation Presentation by: Rubina Kharel

Good afternoon, my name is Rubina Kharel and I am a Toronto resident and a public issues volunteer at the Canadian Cancer Society. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about why I support the recommendations regarding prohibiting the use of hookah in licensed establishments in Toronto.

I am going to start off with some personal experiences I have witnessed. Just last week, a young girl I know turned 16. She went out to dinner with her friends to celebrate her birthday. I follow her on Instagram and Facebook, and she posted several pictures of her friends and herself smoking hookah, and the comments below the pictures were equally "cool" and full of praise from her other friends on how much "fun" they were having and how they should do it more often. I was taken aback a little by the way that young girls of 15 and 16 were smoking shisha so freely, most probably without the knowledge of their parents or guardians, and seemed very proud about it judging from their comments posted on the pictures.

But then I realized I should not have been surprised at all, for we all know that hookahs are a giant loophole in the smoking laws in



Ontario. But why should we be worried? Waterpipes supposedly “don’t contain any tobacco”, are supposedly less harmful than cigarette smoking because the smoke is filtered through water, and herbal shisha is supposedly less harmful than tobacco shisha. They even look pretty exquisite on Facebook pictures. The student associations at York University, where I am a current student, host shisha garden parties twice a year during the first weeks of every semester where all students are invited to relax in the sun and smoke. The amount of freedom and casual shrugs that hookah smoking receives, especially from young adults, are among the very reasons I support the recommendations on prohibiting the use of hookah in licensed establishments. As a young adult myself, I believe it is my responsibility to contribute to and support regulations that will prevent my generation from living an unhealthy lifestyle.

The myths surrounding waterpipe smoking should be dispelled, and any measures to regulate the use of waterpipes at commercial establishments should be complemented with strong public awareness and education initiatives. Regulating the use of indoor waterpipe smoking will benefit the health of our community by strengthening protection against second hand smoke, increasing public awareness of its health effects, preventing youth smoking and continuing to reduce social acceptability of smoking in public places.

Currently, hookah lounges are able to get around the Smoke-Free Ontario Act by claiming that their shisha is herbal, tobacco-free and



that it is heated, not lit. Establishments often also blend their own shisha or use poorly labeled products. This makes it difficult for both the smoker and tobacco enforcement officers to know whether or not the shisha contains tobacco. I was texting my friend yesterday, about my deputation speech, and he told me that he has smoked shisha a few times with friends, but is still unaware of what it actually contains. A ban on smoking water-pipe indoors, both herbal and tobacco, would help solve the problem and make enforcement easier.

Smoking hookah not only poses health risks for the smoker, but also pollutes the air in areas where they are smoked. In a 2013 air monitoring study, researchers from Toronto Public Health found concerning levels of fine air pollutant particles and carbon monoxide, and high levels of airborne nicotine in establishments where hookahs are smoked. The results are consistent with other studies that prove that shishas (both tobacco and herbal) pose health risks for users and bystanders.

Waterpipe smoking has also been a subject of cultural fascination. In fact, hookahs and shishas are part of my own culture and tradition. My grandparents and great-grandparents were addicted hookah smokers, but despite their own habits, they restricted my parents, and all of their fourteen siblings from ever smoking those water-pipes. I cannot speak for everyone, but it amazes me that my grandparents had the insight to not let their kids be exposed to the dangers of hookah smoking four decades ago when my parents were growing up, and it disappoints me that Toronto has not been able to do so for its residents. Yes, culture is valuable, but I am proud to say that my



grandparents made the right decision to not pass on this particular tradition to their kids and grandkids, because living a long life in good health, and spending quality time with family and friends is the only tradition my family needs. **More and more jurisdictions outside North America – including Lebanon, Turkey, UAE, Syria, and a number of Middle Eastern cities - have already banned or severely restricted water-pipe use, or are considering doing so.**

I am concerned about the health of all current residents of this city, but more importantly I am gravely worried about the health of young people like me. I urge you to also adopt the motion approved by the Board of Health, which is before you today, to prohibit hookah smoking in licensed establishments in the City of Toronto by October 1st, 2015. We hope that council takes our voices into consideration, because youth are Canada's future, and we demand a healthy environment for us to thrive.

Thank you for your time. Together we can continue to make progress towards a truly smoke-free Ontario.