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Engel Statement on Surge of Vaping-Related Lung Illnesses

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New York, NY—Congressman Eliot Engel issued the following statement on the current outbreak of vaping-related illnesses stemming from the use of e-cigarettes:

“The current outbreak of vaping-related lung illnesses, including 34 cases in New York, underscore the dangers of vaping. These are dangerous tobacco products and it is the federal government’s responsibility to ensure that they do not fall into the hands of children. I commend the CDC and FDA for working with public and private stakeholders, including poison control centers, to investigate and end this horrible outbreak, which has claimed American lives. In the meantime, Congress must continue to work on commonsense policies that will help lead to the first generation of tobacco-free Americans.”

Abe Baker-Butler, co-Founder of Students Against Nicotine, said “We are watching our friends become addicted to devices with unknown effects and a variety of dangerous chemical components. We see e-cigarette companies appealing directly to our peers with whimsical flavors and other deceptive marketing methods. The recent report from the CDC further emphasizes the need for substantive action to prevent teens from trying e-cigarettes. We applaud Congressman Engel and the other sponsors of this bill for recognizing the severity of this issue, and taking action to protect teenagers from harmful e-cigarette devices.”

Background: A top Member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, Congressman Engel has been the at forefront of helping address the ongoing adolescent e-cigarette epidemic, including the recent surge in vaping-related illnesses. On February 25, 2019, the House passed Representative Engel’s Poison Center Network Enhancement Act, H.R. 501, which would reauthorize funding for poison control centers such as the New York City Regional Poison Control Center that serves Westchester and the Bronx. Federal health agencies have been relying on poison control centers to help respond to the lung illnesses that have afflicted e-cigarette users. Congressman Engel also introduced the bipartisan Smoke-Free Schools Act, H.R. 4019, on July 25, 2019. This legislation would ban e-cigarette use and other vaping devices in schools and childcare facilities.

These recent actions build on the Congressman’s longstanding advocacy for tobacco reduction and cessation. In 2009, he cosponsored the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act and helped pass it through the Energy and Commerce Committee. This landmark legislation, which was signed into law by President Barack Obama on June 22, 2009, gave the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the ability to regulate the manufacturing, marketing, and distribution of tobacco products. The law’s sweeping authorities have enabled the FDA to implement regulations that have saved countless American lives over the last decade.

In 2010, Congressman Engel helped author the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which has helped 100,000 of his constituents gain coverage. Under this law, certain health plans are required to cover tobacco cessation programs, including counseling services and FDA-approved smoking cessation drugs.

In addition to these prior efforts, Congressman Engel has been a steadfast proponent of raising the federal tobacco purchasing age to 21. He was cosponsor of the Tobacco to 21 Act in the 114th and 115th Congressional sessions. On June 20, 2019, he cosponsored the Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act, a comprehensive tobacco cessation bill which would raise the federal tobacco purchasing age to 21.

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