

To Mayor Andersen and City Council, my name is Ashley Hernandez, and I am a sophomore at Holy Names High School in Oakland. I am also an Oakland resident and a member of Girls Inc.

While Piedmont has shown tremendous leadership in the past to limit the sale of flavored tobacco that's targeted to kids, the next step in the right direction is a shift from simply controlling the negative impact of tobacco to ending the tobacco epidemic altogether.

While ending tobacco sales in Piedmont may not eliminate all access to tobacco products by youth in the city, this will at least make it more difficult because tobacco would no longer be sold in close proximity to where youth live and the places they usually go to. There are a variety of ways that tobacco gets into the hands of youth, but that shouldn't stop the city from doing what it can to limit local access.

People experiencing poor mental health have been sold a lie that using tobacco products is an effective way to manage symptoms. While it may provide temporary relief, using tobacco products creates addiction, which itself is a mental health diagnosis. In fact, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) suggests that smoking predicts depression and psychosis, and that quitting is associated with positive mental health outcomes by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression.

In summary, I ask that the City Council consider eliminating the sale of all commercial tobacco products in Piedmont to protect youth and the community. Restricting youth access to tobacco products in Piedmont would be a huge move for public health and could encourage other cities in Alameda County and beyond to do the same. Thank you for your time and consideration!