

WisDOJ: Attorney General Kaul joins bipartisan coalition of 43 Attorneys General urging video streaming industry to protect young viewers from tobacco

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MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul today joined a bipartisan coalition of 43 attorneys general in urging the streaming industry to limit tobacco use in their video content. Due to the growing use of tobacco products amongst teens, the attorneys general urge the streaming industry to take proactive steps to protect the lives of young viewers. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of middle and high school students using e-cigarettes rose from 2.1 million in 2017 to 3.6 million in 2018.

“Reducing tobacco imagery in video content can lead to reduced tobacco use,” said Attorney General Kaul. “We’re asking streaming services to take steps that can help save lives.”

In 2012, the U.S. Surgeon General concluded that watching movies with tobacco imagery increases the likelihood that adolescents will become smokers. In their letter, the Attorneys General urge the video streaming industry to adopt the following policies to protect young viewers from the ill effects of tobacco content:

Eliminate or exclude tobacco imagery in all future original streamed content for young viewers, including any content rated TV-Y, TV-Y7, TV-G, TV-PG, TV-14, G, PG, and PG-13, and ensure that any promotional material such as previews, trailers, image galleries, and clips be tobacco-free. Content with tobacco imagery should be

rated TV-MA or R and only recommended to adult viewers.

Only “recommend” or designate tobacco-free content for children, adolescents, families, and general audiences.

Improve or offer parental controls that are effective, prominent, and easy-to-use, that allow parents and guardians specifically to restrict access to all content with tobacco content, regardless of rating.

Mitigate the negative influence of tobacco content, from whatever source and with any rating, by streaming strong anti-smoking and/or anti-vaping public service announcements, as appropriate, before all videos with tobacco content.

In 1998, Attorneys General across the nation fought to enter into the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement, which imposed major restrictions on tobacco company marketing practices and prohibits advertising aimed at youth. This included banning the advertisement of tobacco products on TV shows, movies and other video content. Despite the ban, studies by the public health organization Truth Initiative found a high rate of tobacco content in streamed videos that are popular with young viewers. In particular, the study discovered high rates of tobacco usage in TV-Y and TV-PG shows. Further, a 2018 study found the streamed videos that are most popular with young viewers feature higher rates of tobacco content than programs shown on traditional television. A 2019 report by the Truth Initiative showed that the danger has only grown in the past year.

In sending today’s letter, Attorney General Kaul was joined by the Attorneys General of California, Nebraska, Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Guam, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Northern Mariana Islands, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, Tennessee, U.S. Virgin Islands, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.