

Testimony of the Faith and Community Against Flavored Tobacco Coalition
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
S.B. 410: 2021 Maryland Local Tobacco Control Bill

Feb. 11, 2021

The Faith and Community Against Flavored Tobacco Coalition, join other coalition partners like the NAACP, LOCAL Maryland and the American Heart Association in strongly supporting S.B. 410 and appreciate the General Assembly's emphasis on promoting health equity, eliminating health disparities and ensuring that Maryland's localities can pass their own laws regulating tobacco products to fit the specific needs of their communities, ultimately improving health in communities of color and the entire state. Local governments in Maryland have been stripped of their power to fully protect residents from the devastating effects of tobacco use due to a contentious 2013 court ruling (*Altadis v. Prince George's County*) — brought on by the tobacco industry — preventing them from passing new laws regulating tobacco products.

This prohibits local governments from responding to what causes people to use tobacco in their communities — stifling progress in reducing use, especially among young people. Without the authority to enact and enforce tobacco control laws, local governments cannot respond to what causes people to use tobacco in their communities. What the state is doing is called preemption and it is ultimately hurting the health of Maryland's residents.

We view preemption as a tool, that being promoted by special interest groups, disempowers and disproportionately hurts people and communities of color and immigrants.

While all individuals should have equal opportunity to live a healthy life, the tobacco industry employs marketing strategies that have led to disparities in tobacco use, including higher use of tobacco products in populations of lower SES, Blacks, AIAN, youth and LGBT individuals. Researchers in Washington, D.C. found that stores in predominantly Black neighborhoods were up to 10 times more likely to display tobacco ads inside and outside than retailers in areas with fewer Black residents.

Communities of color have been unfairly targeted in marketing tobacco-related products and it is hurting the chances of our young people to live healthy and productive lives. It goes without saying that using tobacco-related products is an immense health risk to anyone that uses them. Each year, 7,500 Marylanders die from tobacco related causes. That's one person — a mom or dad, son or daughter, friend or colleague — every hour of every day.

23% of Maryland high school students use electronic smoking devices, more commonly known as vapes. Given the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating impact on the heart, lungs and other vital organs, curbing tobacco use is more important than ever.

The Maryland Local Tobacco Control Bill would restore the ability of localities to enact and enforce local laws regulating the sale and distribution of cigarettes and other tobacco products to fit the needs of their communities.

For all these reasons, I recommend the General Assembly swiftly pass, S.B. 410, so that Maryland's localities can pass their own laws regulating tobacco products to fit the specific needs of their communities and create healthier environments for the citizens of our state.

Sincerely,

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