

Honorable Chair Kelley and Committee Members:

We- Sean, Noah, Josh, and Elliott- submit this testimony to help you, as legislators, consider the reasons for why SB 233 needs to pass. We apologize that we could not come to present this testimony to you in person.

Two years ago we came before you to testify for a tobacco 21 bill. A year after we testified, the bill passed, and now it has the force of law. This bill before you today carries on the spirit of that Tobacco 21 bill you passed last year.

One of the crucial things to the success of smoking companies like JUUL is how they appeal to younger audiences- teenagers more precisely. This is as the younger they can get kids addicted the more easily they can build a long-lasting loyal customer base.

This is not a new strategy.

Tobacco and nicotine companies have marketed to the youth for generations. Both of my grandfathers (Sean) died from lung cancer as they both became addicted to cigarettes at a young age. One of my grandfathers became addicted by age 14 because tobacco companies would give free samples of cigarettes away at the poolhouse he went to. As my grandfather was one of the 95% of adult smokers who started before the age of 21, he quickly developed an addiction and smoked until his death to lung cancer at the age of 76, two years before I was born.

While tobacco companies can't give away free cigarettes to teenagers at poolhouses anymore, they can develop fun flavors to make their products seem more attractive to us. In the case of JUUL, that has meant developing fruit and mint (menthol) flavored pods.

Because of all of this, JUUL and companies like them have already wrought incredible damage. At Towson High in particular, we have seen these JUULs and their pods everywhere- bathrooms, sidewalks, boarded up old restaurants, and school buses. In the boy's bathroom, we've found JUUL pods in urinals. Toilet stalls have actually had 'JUUL Lounge #1, #2, and #3' painted on them. In one of our music classes, there have been groups of kids that will go into the practice room to 'practice' and use their JUULs, only leaving the slight smell of mint, cherry, and lemon behind.

Juuling has become such an integral part of our culture that some science teachers jokingly differentiate between JUULs, the product, and Joules, the energy unit. For an additional example, you need not look further than the trendiest social media at the moment: TikTok. I can't go on TikTok without seeing at least one video of a kid or a group of friends using JUULs. Keep in mind that these videos are made from kids all over the nations, so this isn't just a Maryland problem, it's an American problem.

This bill, SB 233, will plain and simple help solve this problem. Today, we have the opportunity to stop flavored tobacco products. Today, we have the opportunity to end a marketing practice that has got thousands of people addicted to nicotine forever. Today, we have the opportunity to protect the future of thousands of lives of Maryland citizens.

For all these reasons, we strongly urge the passage of SB 233 . Thank you.