



Dear Members of the Finance Committee,

I write to explain why SB233, the “Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition,” is not in our businesses’ or communities’ best interest. I strongly urge you to reject this bill.

The Asian American Retailers Association (AARA) encourages and promotes the responsible sale of legal products and the rights and responsibilities of alcohol beverage retailers. Many of our members who own and operate small stores are struggling to compete with large chains, grocery stores and major national retailers. One way many AARA members compete is selling tobacco products. This brings people and revenue into our stores and helps us stay afloat.

With regard to youth tobacco use, AARA has been vocal in its support for the *We Card* movement. We support and enforce age restrictions for tobacco and alcohol. We also agree we need to address underage vaping. However, banning all flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, as provided for in SB233, makes no sense.

If enacted, the sale of these products would go from lawful businesses with standards to an underground market for these products, including flavored e-cigs. Illicit sellers would not abide by *We Card* or honor regulations as our members do to protect young people. This could actually enable more tobacco consumption among our youth. In addition, the presence of illegal sellers in neighborhoods and communities in Maryland creates new risks for families and new burdens for law enforcement.

The stores, vendors and hardworking people that make up the AARA take the law seriously. We believe providing safe and responsible sales of our products supports the local economy and protects communities. Please vote no on SB233.

Sincerely,

Shrinath Desai  
The Asian American Retailers Association