



***Mission:** To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy*

***Vision:** Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

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## **HB134 Business Regulation-Flavored Tobacco Products-Prohibition**

**Hearing Date: 2/10/21**

**Committee: House Economic Matters Committee**

**Position: SUPPORT**

Chairman Davis and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee: The Maryland Public Health Association would like to express SUPPORT for HB134 “Business Regulation – Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition”. The bill, sponsored Delegate Jazz Lewis, will effectively remove all flavored tobacco products from the market, including menthol cigarettes, flavored e-cigarettes, vapes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco, which is an important step in the right direction for public health.

Even though it is a leading preventable killer in the United States, 7,500 people each year in Maryland alone die because of tobacco use. Data also shows that nearly 9/10 adults who smoke daily begin before the age of 18, and over 80% of youth smokers begin smoking with a flavored tobacco product. This trend continues throughout their tobacco use. In 2020, 85% of high schoolers who used tobacco within the last 30 days reported using flavored tobacco.

Current trends show that e-cigarettes are used by high schoolers 5 times more often than adults. This trend is fueled by the creation and sale of flavored products like cotton candy, mango, and mint. Flavoring tobacco lures children into tobacco use that can last a lifetime.

For decades, the tobacco industry has marketed flavored tobacco products, most commonly menthol cigarettes, to Black and Brown communities. As a result, over 85% of all African-American smokers and 7/10 African American youth smokers smoke menthol cigarettes. The predatory targeting of these communities furthers already existing health disparities.

By eliminating the harmful ways young people and communities of color in Maryland are targeted, HB134 will reduce tobacco related illnesses and deaths, reduce health disparities, and save Maryland hundreds of millions of dollars in healthcare savings. Massachusetts and California have already enacted bans on menthol products, along with numerous states and localities that have banned the sale of flavored tobacco products.

Reducing the number of individuals who smoke has proven to save lives and have a positive economic impact. The Maryland Center on Economic Policy (MDCEP) estimates that the prohibition of flavored tobacco will reduce illness associated with use, and in turn, reduce healthcare costs by billions of dollars. With the savings from reduced tobacco consumption individuals and families will recycle this income back into the economy, providing much needed stimulation.

This bill is an important step to right the wrongs of the tobacco industry, which knowingly sells toxic and addictive products. We urge a favorable report without amendments on HB134.

*The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.*