

February 8 2021

SB 177 / HB 134

Fight Flavored Tobacco in Maryland POSITION:Favorable

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 177/HB 134 legislation that would end the sale of all flavored tobacco products in Maryland, including electronic smoking devices, menthol cigarettes, flavored cigars, and smokeless tobacco. I urge passage of a bill without amendments, free from the type of regulatory loopholes Big Tobacco has exploited for decades.

Flavored tobacco products shamelessly lure children into life-long addiction to a product that is known to cause illness, disability and death. Tobacco companies' predacious tactics are brazen, using flavors such as minty menthol, glazed donut, gummy bear, and cotton candy. Who can argue with a straight face that these products are not designed for children too young to legally purchase and use them?

The tobacco industry has also targeted Black and Brown communities for decades with their predatory marketing of menthol flavored cigarettes. As a result, a staggering 85 percent of all African American smokers smoke menthol cigarettes, resulting in a disproportionate burden of tobacco-related disease and death. African Americans are more likely to die from tobacco-related causes than any other race or ethnic group.

I know from personal experience how these marketing practices work, especially on young people. I started smoking when I was 15, back when cigarette ads were on TV, in magazines, and just about everywhere else. I smoked Marlboros because the ads had horses in them and I was one of those girls who wanted nothing more than a horse. I could not afford a horse, but I sure found it easy to get my hands on Marlboros so that I could at least look like I had one. Most of my friends, who were less enamored with horses, smoked menthol flavored KOOLS. Fortunately, I kicked my cigarette habit (although not the horse one). Not everyone is so lucky. My beloved grandfather, hooked on cigarettes at age 14 died of lung cancer. His brother, who quit too late, suffered from debilitating emphysema for years. I watched them both suffer for years, strong men, proud steel-workers, robbed of their breath inch by inch until they could hardly finish a sentence without gasping for breath, much less walk up a flight of stairs.

We have known how harmful cigarettes are, and how addictive they are for years. I understand that it is nearly impossible to put the cigarette genie back in the bottle and get them off the market. We should have stopped smokeless products on the market when the tobacco industry first began pushing them not so long ago. Certainly, the least we can do now is to use every tool available to prevent these products from getting into the hands of children. They are targeting the most vulnerable and exploited segments of our population. This we can stop.

Know that tobacco products affect more than just the people who use them. They also have negative impacts on the health of the people around them through secondary and tertiary smoke. In addition, the costs of health care, lost productivity, and premature death are shared by all of us, even those who don't have a single family member or friend who smokes. Taxpayers invest in children for years, in education, early childhood development, social programs, nutrition programs, etc. Why should we allow tobacco companies to prey on them as adolescents just at the point when they are about to enter the labor force and power the next generation?

Please ensure our investment and our hope for the future. Please prevent unnecessary illness, suffering and death. Please protect the health and future of Maryland's youth, and end the sale of **all** flavored tobacco products in Maryland. Please, vote yes on SB 177 and HB 134.

Sincerely,

Ann Riley,
124 West Lafayette Ave
Baltimore, Maryland 21217