

I, Mera Anwar oppose the HB 134 bill. We are a family owned store, which has been in operation since 2002. The menthol/flavor ban will have a detrimental effect on my business, my employees, and my family. Currently, menthol cigarettes, flavored cigars and chewing tobacco make approximately 85% of our daily sales.

The loss in revenue would cause a domino effect throughout the industry.

1. I would have to layoff employees to make up for the loss in sales or even shut down my store due to the loss. Currently, we employ around 12 people, who have been with the company from day one. A lot of them are hard working mothers and fathers who are a part of our community. Including my family, who has worked tirelessly to build this business and depend on it for their livelihood.
2. We ID all our customers and were happy with the minimum age increase to 21 for smoking. I understand we have to be vigilant in preventing our youth from becoming smokers but around 71% of our menthol smokers are 30+ and the average age for chewing tobacco customer is 40+.
3. This ban would promote the black market sales of tobacco products. Since we live in a tri-state area gangs will begin selling products from Virginia and DC or even counterfeits from China out of their vans and homes. This will only increase crime in Maryland.
4. Maryland sales revenue would go down and the sales in VA, DC and Delaware would increase. Not only in the tobacco category but gas and other convenience store products because people will prefer to buy from DC or VA- both of which are less than 10 to 20 miles from our store. Massachusetts has faced the same issue.

I am writing this testimony with a lot of hope that you will reconsider the menthol/flavor tobacco ban. This bill is very broad and will penalize hardworking businesses, family and adult smokers. We can explore other options to help us deter youth smokers and new smokers from smoking. I would work diligently to assist in this cause.

Very best,
Mera Anwar
Laurel Sunoco