



# THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

## OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**BILL:** House Bill 134 – Business Regulation – Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition

**SPONSOR:** Delegate Lewis

**HEARING DATE:** February 10, 2021

**COMMITTEE:** Economic Matters

**CONTACT:** Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411

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**POSITION:** SUPPORT

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The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 134**, which prohibits the manufacture, shipping, importing, or sale of flavored tobacco products in the State of Maryland. **HB134** bans flavors in electronic smoking devices, cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, and all other products containing tobacco or nicotine.

Public health has made significant progress in reducing youth smoking through legislative action such as Maryland's Clean Indoor Air Act of 2007 and the Federal Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009. But today, we have a new problem. Maryland's young people are using flavored vape and tobacco products at alarming rates. In Prince George's County, one in three high school students and one in four middle school students have tried an electronic vapor product.<sup>1</sup> Of children who have tried vaping, 90% report using a product with flavoring other than tobacco.<sup>2</sup> The brain is not fully developed until age 25.<sup>3</sup> Nicotine exposure rewires the brain's reward center as it is developing, making it extremely difficult for young people to quit. While we know the impacts of nicotine, vaping products also include chemicals like flavorings, propellants, solvents, and oils.<sup>4</sup> Public health does not yet know the long-term health impacts of inhaling these products. We do know that in 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) investigated over 1,600 cases of people nationwide – as young as 13 years old – getting severe lung illnesses and

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<sup>1</sup> Information pulled from the October 2019 Prince George's County Health Department Vaping factsheet. Data source is the 2016 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

<sup>2</sup> Information pulled from the October 2019 Prince George's County Health Department Vaping factsheet. Data source is the 2016 Maryland Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.yalemedicine.org/stories/vaping-nicotine-addiction/>

<sup>4</sup> Pulled directly from the October 2019 Prince George's County Health Department Vaping factsheet. Information source is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

injuries due to vaping; dozens of patients died.<sup>5</sup> By banning flavored vaping products, **HB134** may deter young people from initiating use.

**HB134** would also ban flavored tobacco products like menthol cigarettes and flavored cigars and cigarillos, a measure that is long overdue. While overall cigarette sales decreased from 2011 to 2015, sales of menthol cigarettes increased.<sup>6</sup> Menthol cigarettes are the only flavored cigarette product left on the market after the passage of the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act in 2009. Evidence shows that young people are more likely to experiment with cigarettes if they have menthol flavoring, and they are more likely to become addicted if flavoring is present.<sup>7</sup> According to the CDC, menthol products have been “aggressively marketed” to young people and African Americans.<sup>8</sup> Cigar and cigarillo use is more common in African American males than in other racial/ethnic groups, and the majority of young cigar users report using flavored products.<sup>9</sup> There is no reason for tobacco products to be sold in flavors like grape, vanilla, apple, or menthol. Passing **HB134** is especially important for the protection of our young minority populations, who have been on the receiving end of aggressive marketing by the tobacco industry.

Deterring vape use is even more urgent in today’s public health crisis. Emerging research shows teenagers and young adults who vape face a much higher risk of COVID-19 than their peers who do not vape. According to a study by the Stanford University School of Medicine, young people who had used both cigarettes and e-cigarettes in the previous 30 days were almost five times as likely to experience COVID-19 symptoms, such as coughing, fever, tiredness and difficulty breathing as those who never smoked or vaped.<sup>10</sup>

Members of the Economic Matters Committee, we encourage you to use your power to protect our young people. A vote for **HB134** is a vote for reducing lung-related disease and death in Maryland. Support for this legislation will have an immediate, positive impact on public health. For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George’s County Executive **SUPPORTS House Bill 134** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.

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<sup>5</sup> Pulled directly from the October 2019 Prince George’s County Health Department Vaping factsheet. Information source is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0390.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0390.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/african-americans/index.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <https://truthinitiative.org/sites/default/files/media/files/2019/03/Cigars-Fact-Sheet-10-2017.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Information pulled from the Association Between Youth Smoking, Electronic Cigarette Use, and COVID-19, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1054139X20303992>