

January 25, 2021

Testimony on SB 177 / HB 134
Fight Flavored Tobacco in Maryland

Position: Favorable

St. Francis Neighborhood Center Supports SB 177/HB 134.

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

Flavored tobacco products lure kids into a life-long struggle with deadly addiction, hooking them on products in flavors like minty menthol, glazed donut, gummy bear, and cotton candy.

For decades, the tobacco industry has targeted Black and Brown communities with their predatory marketing of flavored tobacco products, namely menthol 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.

As the Executive Director and Operations & Program Director of St. Francis Neighborhood Center, we have seen first hand how those we serve-- including youth/underage--depend on this unhealthy habit--and given that 100% of our served families live below the poverty line, 98% are African American--it is a triple punch to our community. 1. It is expensive, 2. We watch our families struggle with their health, and 3. Quite frankly we are exhausted by yet one more avenue to target and extinguish the African American community.

To protect the health and futures of Maryland's youth, we must end the sale of all flavored tobacco products in Maryland. Urge Maryland legislators to vote yes on SB 177 and HB 134.

Sincerely,



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