

TESTIMONY OF COMPTROLLER PETER FRANCHOT

Support – House Bill 134 – Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products – Prohibition

Economic Matters Committee

February 10, 2021

Chairman Davis, Vice Chairman Dumais and members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to provide testimony in **support** of **House Bill 134 – Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products – Prohibition**. I would like to thank Del. Lewis for sponsoring this important legislation, and the Committee for providing the opportunity for my testimony to be heard.

This year, the Maryland General Assembly has a historic opportunity to save lives, address racial health inequity, and support our economy by removing all flavored tobacco products – including menthol cigarettes – from the market. I strongly support this critical policy and urge state lawmakers to protect our youth and Black and Brown communities.

Big Tobacco has one goal: Profit. Since their products kill or gravely harm many of their customers, they need to recruit the next generation of users to maintain their revenue stream – our kids. The younger they are, the longer they will buy this highly-addictive, deadly, and costly product throughout their lifetime.

The tobacco industry has used countless ploys to target kids, from the Flintstones in the '60s to Joe Camel in the late '80s. They recently introduced tobacco products in kid-friendly flavors like gummy bear, cotton candy, and minty menthol. These flavors mask the harsh taste of tobacco, making it easier for kids to start and get trapped into a lifelong addiction. As a result, youth use of flavored tobacco and e-cigarettes has skyrocketed. One in four Maryland high school students currently use e-cigarettes – a rate five times higher than adults. Not surprisingly, 80 percent of young people who have ever used tobacco started with a flavored product.

While this legislation seems like a no-brainer, some question the tax revenue implications. Ending the sale of flavored tobacco products isn't just the right thing to do; it's the fiscally smart thing to do. By allowing flavored tobacco to create a new generation of smokers, we ensure illness and death will impact thousands of Marylanders each year in the decades ahead. Today, 7,500 Marylanders die each year

from tobacco-related causes, costing Marylanders \$2.7 billion in healthcare every year, which far exceed any tax revenues we gain from their sale.

Our most vulnerable residents' well being hinges on government leaders taking a stand against special interests and the Big Tobacco profits at this critical moment. I strongly urge the General Assembly to pass legislation ending the sale of all flavored tobacco products. Lives depend on it.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request a **favorable report** for House Bill 134. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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