



January 26, 2021

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

Position: Favorable

Communities United 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.

Communities United's mission is to organize and empower low income Marylanders to achieve transformative change on issues of racial, economic, and social justice. Ironically, the sale of flavored tobacco products in the great state of Maryland crosses all of those issues! This legislation will have racial, economic and social justice implications for the community that we have served since 2010. 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.

When I presented this legislation to our board of directors there was initially some doubt regarding if this was something we wanted to support. It should come as no surprise that about half of our board are current or prior tobacco users. They immediately became concerned that this legislation could impact their personal decisions to use tobacco. One thing they did agree on however, is that tobacco should not be targeted to their children & grandchildren! This is not about using tobacco. This is about promoting a harmful product to our children through the use of flavors that are made just for kids. This is why our board voted to support this legislation! We at Communities United urge Maryland legislators to vote yes on SB 177 and HB 134.

Sincerely,

Jane Henderson,
Executive Director of Communities United