

February 2, 2021

Dear Chairman Davis and Members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

I am testifying today as a member of the Maryland Youth Against Flavored Tobacco Coalition to support SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition." This coalition consists of many youth-led organizations that are both county-wide such as the Montgomery County Student Government Association (MCR-SGA) and state-wide such as Maryland Youth For Change. Following several meetings with both middle and high school students who have also been personally impacted by flavored tobacco, I have been inspired to submit a written testimony detailing my personal experiences with flavored tobacco.

When I first entered middle school, it brought a whole host of new changes. Many were good, such as becoming more independent and making dozens of new friends; but some were less positive than I thought they would be, such as being exposed to a culture that glorifies JUULing. In sixth grade, I made an incredible friend named *Alice in our computer science class. After being forced to sit together on the first day of school, we became incredibly close friends — even though that was only after I gave her some of the chips I was eating. Although I knew that she had friends that used JUUL, I never thought that she would turn to it. In my head, I thought that someone I knew as one of the most responsible students in our grade would never turn to nicotine. That somehow receiving an A every quarter was enough to ward off any tobacco addiction.

Seventh grade brought along numerous changes, but the most notable were the introduction of a quarter-long health class and a newfound distance between Alice and me. In health, we had an entire unit dedicated to the negative effects of tobacco on both your health and social relationships. Although the increased risk of lung cancer and other horrific illnesses were constantly being drilled into our consciousnesses, I continued to watch as my classmates and even friends fell victim to the relentless social pressure surrounding the usage of JUULs. I would sit in my health class listening to students asking about where to buy JUUL pods — even when we had just finished a lesson warning against vaping. I could only wonder to myself whether one of the reasons Alice and I had drifted apart was because she had started to vape.

My suspicions were only proved correct in eighth grade. I had to watch as the friend that would constantly FaceTime me to work on homework together turned into someone who would skip class just to visit the bathroom and JUUL. I tried to talk to her and convince her to see our school counselor on her own, but she always shook me off by saying she was already seeing a therapist and that she had everything together. A few months later, she admitted that she had already tried to stop vaping for a bit and that the withdrawal effects were too much for her. She was worried that she had already fallen too deep into flavored tobacco's trap.

Luckily for Alice, she was able to push through the withdrawal symptoms and end her tobacco addiction. But I knew countless other classmates that were isolated and immensely hurt by their usage of flavored tobacco. What disappoints me is that an entire system let Alice and many other students down by neglecting her when she needed help the most. Years of Alice's life were spent fighting against the relentless temptation of tobacco addiction, and I know that to this day she still struggles with it. For these reasons, I urge you to support the passage of a clean SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition."

Respectfully Submitted,

Angelina Xu
Maryland Youth Against Tobacco Coalition

All names have been changed for privacy concerns.