

Date: Current Date

Written Testimony Unfavorable to SB 134 - Flavored Tobacco Products – Prohibition

I, **John Boucouvalas**, of **The Gott Company**, affirm that all statements in this testimony are accurate.

I am the Director of Operations for **9** convenience/grocery retail stores in Maryland, located throughout **Calvert & St. Mary's Counties**. Combined these stores employ more than **200** people.

Approximately 30-40% of our store sales come from cigarette or tobacco products. Menthol or flavored tobacco products account for roughly 40% – 50% of that total. If the proposed flavor ban is enacted, it will severely damage our businesses and cause tremendous financial hardship forcing us to close some of our stores and layoff much of our staff. Ultimately, the prohibition of flavored tobacco products will trigger a significant loss of jobs and tax revenue in the state.

Whereas people those who are into these products will drive to different States to get what they need. It will create an unnecessary competition between states and business. There is a long history in our country of products being banned, only for that market to move to illicit and illegal channels, resulting in extraordinarily harmful consequences to our society. The damage to society has been immeasurable and long-lasting. Ultimately Maryland will be losing the business. As you know, small businesses like ours, are the backbone of our economy. We are the “essential workers” that have served our local communities every single day throughout the Covid pandemic. If we cannot survive, our communities and many local economies will not survive either.

I strongly urge every delegate to reconsider this flavor ban and instead partner with the retail sector to better enforce the current regulations to prevent abuse such as minimum age-restrictions, constraints on purchase quantities and public education programs to promote responsible tobacco use.

Sincerely

*John Boucouvalas*

John Boucouvalas

Title: Director of Operations

Company: The Gott Company

Affiliated Stores: 8 Fastop Food Stores & Bowen's Grocery Store.