



ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG ABUSE ADVISORY COUNCIL

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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BUSINESS REGULATION—FLAVORED TOBACCO
PRODUCTS—PROHIBITION
HB0134

Submitted by the Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council
to the Maryland House Economic Matters and Health and Government Operations Committees

January 25, 2021

Dear Members of the Economic Matters Committee and Health and Government Operations Committee:

The Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AODAAC) writes to you to support HB0134 - “Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition” and to extend our appreciation to the Committee for giving this issue the time and consideration it deserves. We encourage you to pass a clean bill that protects our children and communities from a toxic product that kills 7,500 people in Maryland each year and is actively hooking an entirely new generation of kids.

The Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AODAAC) provides guidance to the County Executive and County Council for Montgomery County by identifying alcohol and other drug prevention and treatment needs and reviewing the county’s efforts in addressing those needs. We are comprised of experts in prevention and treatment, and have representatives from the legal, business, and medical communities. AODAAC urges the passage of HB0134 -Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition for the reasons stated in the testimony submitted by the Maryland Public Interest Research Group (PIRG).

Big Tobacco has targeted and exploited our communities for far too long, leading Marylanders to lifelong struggles with addiction, sickness, and suffering. They are deceitful, manipulative, and clever, now using flavored products to target youth through advertising in print and digital media including social media platforms like Instagram. In the last few years, Big Tobacco has expanded its flavored offerings to over 15,000 products including mint or menthol, gummy bear, cotton candy, and many others. Flavors like “Pop Tartz” and strawberry shortcake are readily available through a variety of products that are highly attractive to kids.

The most popular product tends to be electronic smoking devices known as e-cigarettes or vapes. This product delivers massive doses of nicotine through a product that tastes good and is easy to inhale. We know that 80% of young people who have ever used tobacco started with a flavored product and 23% of Maryland high school students currently use e-cigarettes - a rate 5 times higher than adults. Even though

there is currently an age restriction to purchase these products, clearly kids are still getting their hands on them given the rates of use.

Big Tobacco has used this playbook before by predatorily targeting Black and Brown communities through menthol cigarette advertising, product discounts, and giveaways. As a result, the amount of African American smokers who smoke menthol jumped from 5% in 1952 to about 85% today. Like other flavored products, menthol masks the harsh taste of tobacco, making it easier for people to smoke. It reduces irritation, which allows people to inhale larger amounts deeper and longer, increasing nicotine intake and its addictive qualities.

Black and Brown people in particular are susceptible to addiction because nicotine is stored in tissues that contain melanin, the substance that gives color to our skin. The darker the skin of a person, the more nicotine is stored in their body. This has led to a devastating and disproportionate burden of suffering in Black and Brown communities.

The sale of flavored tobacco products undeniably increases the suffering of Black and Brown communities as well as the prevalence of youth addiction to tobacco products. It is preventable. We can do something about it. We urge you to support the passage of a clean HB0134 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition."

Respectfully Submitted,

The Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council (AODAAC)

CC: Members of the Economic Matters Committee and Health and Government Operations Committee