

Mighty Fortress Ministries

February 8, 2021

Testimony on SB 177/ HB 134

Fight Flavored Tobacco in Maryland

Position: Favorable

Mighty Fortress Ministries supports SB 177/HB 134. As a community of faith, we are concerned about the health outcomes of members and the communities in which we serve—predominately African American. We therefore, support legislation that would end the sale of all flavored tobacco products in Maryland. This includes but is not limited to the selling of electronic smoking devices, menthol cigarettes, flavored cigars, smokeless tobacco, any other product that is utilized to aid in the consumption of the addictive tobacco substance.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cites research demonstrating that youth (12-17) and young adults (18-24) identify flavor as a major reason for use of hookah, cigars, menthol cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco. While further research demonstrates that our young people believe flavored tobacco products to be a safer alternative to smoking, the FDA has yet to prove this to be factual. However, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) specifically points to flavored tobacco as a more addictive substance than regular tobacco products.

This is a problem when we consider that tobacco is a major contributor to the three leading causes of death amongst African Americans---heart disease, cancer, and stroke. African Americans, and particularly our youth, are being lured into a life-long struggle with a deadly addiction. When considering the success rate of those who attempt to quit, research by the CDC shows African Americans are less successful at their attempts to quit than their White and Hispanic counterparts.

The tobacco industry has aggressively targeted African Americans in urban communities. As a leader in the faith community, we are concerned about the willful harm being brought to members of our community. We are advocating the passage of SB 177/ HB 134 to protect the health and future of our youth and our community at large. We encourage all Maryland legislators to vote “YES” on SB 177 and HB 134.

Sincerely,

Leslye Dwight

Rev. Leslye Dwight
Executive Director
Mighty Fortress Ministries