

January 26, 2021

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

Position: Favorable

Rabbi Daniel Cotzin Burg of Beth Am Synagogue in Baltimore, MD, 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.

Flavored tobacco products lure kids into a life-long struggle with deadly addiction, hooking them on products in flavors like minty menthol, glazed donut, gummy bear, and cotton candy.

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.

I, personally, know the effects of nicotine addiction on young people. My father became addicted to cigarettes when he was a young teenager. As a child, I watched him struggle to quit over and over again, only to return to smoking. Eventually, my dad's addiction most likely took his life when he died of cancer at age 54. I am grateful he met my wife and danced at my wedding. I'm devastated he never met his granddaughter (who is named for him) nor his grandson. Because of predatory tobacco companies targeting young people, my father spent a lifetime fighting against his addiction. Since then Big Tobacco has discovered new technologies to make their products child-friendly. This needs to stop in Maryland!

The Faith & Community Against Flavored Tobacco coalition's mission is to stop Big Tobacco from targeting Maryland's children and Black and Brown communities. To protect the health and futures of Maryland's youth, we must end the sale of **all** flavored tobacco products in Maryland. Urge Maryland legislators to vote yes on SB 177 and HB 134.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Daniel Cotzin Burg
Beth Am Synagogue, Baltimore, MD