



Jared E. Brewster  
Neighborhood Forward (Maryland)  
2229 St. Paul Street  
Baltimore, MD 21218

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members:

Neighborhood Forward is concerned with *SB177 Business Regulation – Flavored Tobacco Products – Prohibition* recently introduced legislation that would ban the sale of menthol cigarettes. In the course of the debate over this bill, many pressing and critical issues have been raised concerning both the public health and the criminal justice implications of a ban on cigarettes that are preferred by people of color.

Although we have taken a different position concerning this legislation than others, we all share the same belief that we can have a robust and productive debate that prioritizes both public health and criminal justice concerns. Our collective primary interest is protecting the public, specifically communities of color, from abuse at the hands of both corporate influences and law enforcement.

To that end, we are requesting that any proposed ban on menthol cigarettes be withdrawn at this time, and a working group convened, with the set mission to offer recommendations for new legislation. That working group must take into account all of our collective concerns and address the need for greater public health protections that do not compromise our constitutional and civil rights.

It is unjust to expect communities of color to choose between greater public health protections and basic civil rights. We do not accept the premise that we must choose between the two, that these interests are mutually exclusive, or that this debate is zero-sum. A working group consisting of social justice advocates and law enforcement leaders, along with other organizations, is the best solution available to bridge the current divide.

We request to sit down with you to discuss our concerns. We greatly appreciate your attention to this matter and eagerly await your reply.

Respectfully,

Jared E. Brewster