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Chair, Delores G. Kelley
Vice-Chair, Brian J. Feldman
Senate, Finance Committee

Re: Support for SB 177- "Business Regulation- Flavored Tobacco Products- Prohibition"

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman and Members of the Finance Committee:

I write in support of Senate Bill 177, which prohibits flavored tobacco products. This important legislation helps protect our children and the Maryland community from a product that kills 7,500 Marylanders a year. This new wave of flavored tobacco is designed to be attractive to young kids and is creating an entirely new generation of tobacco users that will be subject to the same or worse health effects of previous generations.

This is not the first time that Big Tobacco has targeted and exploited our communities, but as State's Attorney and as a citizen of Maryland, I think that this law can help end Big Tobacco's exploitation. Our citizens have struggled with economic hardships, addiction and countless medical illnesses directly related to tobacco. Flavored tobacco continues this exploitation, in the last few years, tobacco companies have begun offering over 15,000 products including mint or menthol, gummy bear and cotton candy and are creating flavors such as, "Pop Tartz" directly targeted to teens and young adults.

The most popular product tends to be the e-cigarettes or vapes, which we now know delivers massive doses of nicotine through a product that tastes good and is easy to inhale. In a truly staggering number, 80% of young people who have ever used tobacco started with a flavored product. In Maryland, 23% of high schoolers currently use e-cigarettes, a rate 5 times higher than adults. It is clear that the current age restriction is not blocking the use of tobacco by our young people.

As I have previously indicated, this is not Big Tobacco's first foray in targeting Black and Brown communities. The use of menthol cigarettes resulted in an extraordinary increase in tobacco use by our community. In 1952, 5% of African Americans smoked menthol, through advertising, product discounts and discounts that number increased to 85% today. 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. This addiction and devastation is preventable; I urge a favorable report on SB 177.

Thank you for your consideration.


Aisha N. Braveboy