

January 28, 2021

Dear Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing to you to support SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition" and to extend my appreciation to the Committee for giving this issue the time and consideration it deserves. I encourage you to pass a clean bill that protects Maryland's 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.

I am a teenager and grew up around many adults that smoke. It has always bothered me because I know that it's not good for anybody's body. There was a time, in 6th or 7th grade when I was twelve when I was in school and had to use the bathroom. I got up and went to the bathroom, where I saw two girls smoking in front of me. When I saw those two girls smoking, I didn't know what to do or even how to react. I was so shocked to see it right in front of my eyes, and soon after I realized that this was a thing that I would see more than once among my peers. I am now in 11th grade, age seventeen; it's been five years and nothing has been done that has stopped things like this from happening.

I want to protect my generation and all the others that come after that as well. Right now, since we're so young, we teens are at a point in our lives where we don't want to be controlled when nobody wants to listen to their parent, teacher, or any adult. Blinded by wanting to do what we want to do, we often can't see the bigger consequences of our actions and how they will affect us in the long run. We are the youth, the young, the future, and I want to help protect that. I care about my generation. We can do great things, but not if tobacco addiction stands in our way. Legislators need to do something sooner rather than later.

Vaping gives kids and teenagers a bad coping mechanism. I enjoy the taste of sweet things like candy or chocolate and if something tastes good, I'm going to want more of it. If someone offers me vegetables I'm not going to want any of that - vegetables taste nasty. Kids are always going to want candy over vegetables and it's the same concept with flavored tobacco. If tobacco tastes sweet it's going to attract people my age or younger who like those sweet things, too. If it tastes nasty, nobody is going to want that. That's why we need to stop selling flavored tobacco.

I know many may say that the solution to this is an age restriction. This is the wrong solution; when has an age restriction stopped teenagers from drinking, from smoking, from taking drugs? It hasn't. It will not be a solution to this problem, either. It is not hard to get a fake ID for teenagers, and even if we couldn't, there are still adults in this world that would do anything for a penny and who don't care who they sell tobacco to. Please hear me and help me look out for my generation and future generations, by passing a clean bill.

Respectfully Submitted,

Makaiya Cheatham