

January 28, 2021

Dear Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Maryland Youth Against Flavored Tobacco (MD YAFT) Coalition and MoCo for Public Health to support SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition" and would like to thank you for taking the time to review this issue. Our coalition is composed of many youth-led organizations with both county-wide groups such as the Montgomery County Student Government Association (MCR-SGA) and state-wide groups such as Maryland Youth For Change.

After conducting research in my personal time about the adverse effects of flavored tobacco and witnessing what it does to the youth in my generation I feel compelled to voice my opinion on this issue, and hopefully give some insight on the situation at hand. E-cigarettes and flavored tobacco products are known to have consequences such as lung problems and impeded brain development. Although these products are used by a range of age groups, the bulk of the advertisements heavily targets teenagers as they can be easily manipulated by social constructs about what is "cool" or "popular." Social factors play a tremendous role in lack of judgement and tobacco companies are taking advantage of that by enticing the youth through the addition of cotton candy, popcorn, donut and sweet flavoring into their products.

I've personally seen how teens are easily drawn into new trends with the effort to fit into society and even though I've never been attracted to tobacco products, I've seen myself fall into the trap of trends. It is inevitable that teenagers feel the need to fit into society by conforming to its standards, and acts such as vaping and the usage of flavored tobacco products is a prime example. I've seen clips of my friends using a vape or JUUL on their Snapchat stories and wish they weren't sucked into temptation. I know that they feel cool when doing it because tobacco companies have made such a strong effort to make sure that's what they believe. There have been many times when I've walked into a bathroom at my high school and even middle school during a class period and saw a group of girls skipping class to vape. To my surprise I would be greeted with sweet scents and vapor in my face. My first thoughts went to concerns about their health because I've grown to learn about the negative health problems vapes can produce, but my second thought went how they were skipping class just to vape. Their education was being affected, but I wasn't sure I could blame them. Tobacco companies have decided to place a target on their back and once that shot is fired it leaves a scar of addiction.

E-cigarettes and vapes such as JUUL contain nicotine which makes the products highly addictive and can mess with brain function. In many cases, the person knows how bad the products are for them, but are incapable of quitting. Teenagers with immense amounts of potential to succeed can fall behind because of addiction and although there is a legal age limit in place for the use of these products, it doesn't make them significantly less accessible for young people. I would dread seeing another one of my close friends or peers fall into this lifestyle.

7,500 people in Maryland die each year because of a tobacco-related cause. That means 7,500 lives in Maryland are on our hands if we choose not to do anything about this issue. I understand many of you might have a differing opinion or have made commitments on how you will vote on this bill, but I ask you to look into the hardships these products are placing on residents in Maryland and consider how many lives we can save by passing this bill; how many lives YOU can save. Please support the passage of the SB 177 bill. Lives and futures depend on it.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elissa Lou  
MoCo for Public Health  
Maryland Youth Against Tobacco Coalition