

January 26, 2021

Opposition of SB177

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

My name is Charles Gott and I am the owner of Vape Jungle, which consists of 4 small business vape shops in the Maryland community. I am writing to oppose the flavor prohibition (SB177). I provide 15 jobs to employees who have families to support. This small business I have cultivated with my life savings and an immense amount of time, is also how I support my own family.

I smoked cigarettes for a very long time. So long in fact, I never thought I'd actually quit. Since there were so many failed attempts at other "approved" cessation products, I figured all hope was lost and that I would spend the rest of my life addicted to cigarettes. A friend of mine let me try her vape one night at a party. The next day I went into a vape shop and got my first set up. I have now been tobacco free for 7 and a half years. I no longer wheeze, I sleep much better, and I no longer have a nasty smoker's cough. I used coffee flavor to quit, and there is no way I would ever go back to smoking or using a tobacco flavored product. Tobacco is the flavor I wanted to move away from and I'm so glad that I did.

My success in quitting smoking through vaping led me to open my own business. I knew if I could quit smoking using this method, than anyone could. I have helped thousands of people quit smoking in my community. This includes veterans and the elderly. In my experience of owning and operating vape shops, I have seen countless people relapse back to cigarettes when using a tobacco flavor. Tobacco flavor is what adults are seeking to move away from. Most find success in using a flavor they enjoy. This flavor typically varies from adult to adult, but is the driving force that keeps them vaping and not picking up a cigarette.

I want Maryland legislators to understand that we are not big tobacco. We do not carry any big tobacco products or products that big tobacco has a stake in such as Juul. Juul is what the teens are experimenting with and for this very reason we have avoided selling this and similar products in our locations, as have other Maryland vape shops. I also take pride in the fact that my business has passed multiple compliance checks. We are doing our part to keep the products we sell away from teens. So much in fact, that we do not allow anyone under 21 years of age in our stores. We ID at the door, and turn away customers we believe to be making a straw purchase.

Cigarettes kill close to 500,000 people each year. Yet nicotine flavored vapes have killed no one. I would still be smoking cigarettes right now if it wasn't for COFFEE flavored e-liquid. Coffee! A flavor most adults in enjoy, sometimes with vanilla, sometimes with caramel! If you ban flavored vape products you will send a lot of adults back to cigarettes or worse, the black market. E-liquid can easily be made with items found from Walmart or ordered online. These products would have no quality control, many would use the wrong ingredients, and this could go so wrong and be very dangerous. In addition to the above, Maryland is not a very big state. People will travel outside of the state to buy these products and bring them back to sell underground. This bill does not solve the problem, and takes useful tax revenue away additionally.

WE ARE NOT BIG TOBACCO. We are small business in the community that employs other people in the community. We help people quit combustible cigarettes, we offer low nicotine options to help people

ween off of vaping as well. We've operated a business for 7 years and watched in horror as big tobacco (Juul, Vuse, etc.) came into our industry and made it into a complete circus.

I am asking you, PLEASE, do not shut down my small business. Please do not take away jobs from our community. Please allow me to continue to help adults transition from combustible cigarettes to a products that has been proven to be a least 95% less harmful.

I have nothing to hide. I am always available for a shop visit or questions. Myself (as I'm sure all Maryland vape shops) want to act as a resource to help our legislators understand the other side of the coin.

Kind regards,

Charles Gott

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