



NAACP

Maryland

STATE CONFERENCE

SENATE BILL 177

Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition

CHAIRMAN GUY GUZZONE

BUDGET AND TAX COMMITTEE

My name is Willie Flowers and I am President of the NAACP Maryland State Conference and we stand in favor of Senate Bill 177.

The first anti-smoking campaign that I ever witnessed was the American Cancer Society's "Dragon Lady" PSA that featured a young Robin Givens. It was a breath of fresh air in a smoke filled room. She was a young cute girl moving around an arcade game room smoking and creating havoc in what was the sanctuary and destination point for anyone young. The visual hit home. It stuck with me and made me feel like I could keep people from smoking.

It was not until I was a senior in high school at the end of the 1980's when I really gained information about the health horrors of tobacco. Both smoking cigarettes and smokeless tobacco were reduced to death wishes in my research for a high school speech class. I was enriched with the knowledge of what tobacco did to the human body whether by smoking it or placing it into your mouth as chewing tobacco, dip or snuff. It could make you sick and kill you dead. If cigarettes were "cancer sticks" then smokeless tobacco was like putting cancer into your mouth. I'm sure the journals I read at the time didn't say that directly but that was the conclusion I came gleaned and it motivated me to commit myself to never smoking or buying cigarettes. For the life of me I am so happy I made that silent decision.

I would learn systemic build blocks of communities or "social determinants of health" worked to influence our environment and could help to achieve positives health outcomes or negative ones. That is why as a college student I was part of a movement that made our campus "smoke free." It seems like a small fete now but before that time smokers were lighting up anywhere and we knew very little about the cancer causing impact of second hand smoke. This was followed by the shutdown of smoking on airplanes and the tobacco settlement in the late 1990's. This \$260 Billion tobacco settlement was achieved during the Clinton years with 46 Attorney General's in the United States as plaintiffs. The case proved that American tobacco companies caused Americans to be sick and were responsible for outstanding state health costs. It also revealed a history of deceptive and negligent advertising schemes which targeted Black African communities specifically.

Because of that I personally support this bill because it could ease the pain and death in families like mine who have had members die because cancer and heart disease influenced by smoking.

In most cases menthol options were at the center of the process of going from smoking as a child, to chain smoking as an adult to sickness and then death. At the same time starting this bad habit with a child watching.

The introduction of vaping and flavored cigars are only an extension of the sickness and death cycle. We can stop it by changing policy. That simple step would allow families to love each other longer and to live out their dreams together.

For all reasons itemized Senate Bill 177 is important policy that can save lives. My generation has probably seen the worst of the pain and death but we have the influence of the system that has caused it and we should use it. We encourage this Senate committee to take the first step.