

January 28, 2021

Dear Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

As a young person living in America, my future is constantly under attack. In the government, I see racist and xenophobic leaders who seem to actively work against the American ideals of equal opportunity and inclusiveness. In the world, I see daily news reports detailing the potentially earth-shattering effects that climate change will bring if no prevention actions are taken. Not to mention a grueling, mishandled pandemic that has taken over 400,000 American lives. With so many outside dangers, internal threats can often be overlooked. One such issue is the growing popularity of flavored tobacco products.

I have seen it first hand; what starts as a random indulgence at parties can quickly overtake someone's life—the nicotine holding them hostage. Suddenly, their daily routines are disrupted when they can't get their hit. In school, they leave class to go to the "bathroom" or, most times, just sneak a puff into their sweatshirt while the teacher isn't looking. When they get caught, teachers and administrators become increasingly aware. They impose new consequences—to no avail. Now, bathroom monitors, a concept I thought would be left in elementary school, have begun stationing themselves in the hallways. For me, it became entirely unsurprising to walk into one of these bathrooms to find a large group of kids sharing a single, smuggled Juul.

As mishandled as they are in school, they're even more dangerous with minimal governmental regulations. Politicians may say that, by pushing back the age to buy tobacco products to 21, they are preventing young people from getting addicted. However, according to statistics, 23% of high school students use e-cigarettes. A politician may ask: what more can be done? The answer is simple: stop advertising colorful and flavorful products to underage people. With flavors like popcorn, cotton candy, and mango, big tobacco companies are knowingly targeting young people with flashy advertisements and commercials, encouraging them to find a way to consume their products.

The only way to stop this attack on our youth is by cutting it off at the source. Big tobacco companies must be held accountable for their actions. Their intentional targeting must cease. Young people are the future. We will inherit a world with countless issues and injustices, all of which we will fight to resolve. Politicians always say that they want to leave a better world for their children, so this is your chance to prove it. Prove to the young people across the state that you care enough to protect us. If you don't, if you choose to sit idly by while predatory industries attack our most vulnerable, we will vote you out. Young people vote for our future. If you are too cowardly to support us, you will be left in the past. End the sale of flavored tobacco products. Protect your children and their future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,  
Ryan Williams-Abrams  
Maryland Youth Against Tobacco Coalition