

Date: January 26, 2021

Written Testimony to Oppose Menthol and Flavor Ban Bill (SB 177)

I, Ather Chaudhry, of Azan Petro Maryland, affirm that all statements in this testimony are accurate.

I am an owner of 34 convenience retail stores in Maryland, all located in Central Maryland, (PG, AA, Howard, Baltimore, St Mary's, Montgomery) Together at these stores, we employ more than 100 people.

30-40% of our store sales are coming from cigarette and tobacco products. Among that sales 50-60% of it is Menthol or flavored tobacco product. If this proposed Menthol ban takes place it will severely damage our businesses, leading to crippling financial hardship for us. The result would be closure of many of our stores and layoffs of many of our employees. It will create significant number of job loss, less revenue, and less tax for Government. Whereas people those who are into these products will drive to different States to get what they need. It will create an unnecessary competition between States and business. There is a long history in our country of products being banned, only for that market to move to illicit and illegal channels, resulting in extraordinarily harmful consequences to our society. The damage to society has been immeasurable and long-lasting. Ultimately Maryland will be losing the business. As you know small business like us are the backbone of our economy as we serve everyday essentials and groceries to our local communities. If we cannot survive in our community, economy will not survive.

A better approach for our government would be smartly legislate the distribution and sale of menthol tobacco products. We urge you to reconsider this ban and partner with us to enforce the already-available regulations to prevent abuse such as minimum age-restrictions, constraints on quantities, robust licensing, and partner in developing public educational programs regarding responsible tobacco use for our youth.

Sincerely,

Ather Chaudhry

Azan Petro

Harwood Market, Paceway BP, Forbes BP, Hi Tech Mobil, Dunkirk BP, 301 Truck Stop, Village Exxon, Campus way BP, Kettering BP, Columbia crossing Mobil, Long gate Mobil, Woodyard Exxon, Whitemarsh BP and more.