

January 28, 2021

Dear Chair Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Maryland Youth Against Flavored Tobacco Coalition in support of SB177- “Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition.” Our coalition comprises several local and state youth-led organizations such as the Youth Activism Project, Maryland Youth for Change, and the Montgomery County Student Government Association. We have held several meetings in which we have discussed our experiences with flavored tobacco products. After hearing their stories, and witnessing firsthand the negative effects of these products on middle and high school age children, I believe all flavored tobacco products should not be sold in Maryland.

Throughout my high school years, I saw many of my peers get hooked on these flavored tobacco products. Every day, several of my classmates would leave class to get a fix of nicotine so they can alleviate the withdrawal symptoms they felt after not using their vapes for several hours. Any public high school student can attest to seeing discarded Juul packages in the toilets or trash cans of their respective bathrooms any given day of the week. I knew friends that would beg their older siblings to buy them 3 packs of Juul pods at the nearest gas station to get them through the next two weeks. For reference, one ‘pod’ is the equivalent of 20 cigarettes. A recent survey showed that 1 in 5 Maryland high school students vape, honestly not to my surprise. By my senior year, people would be buying and selling vapes in school almost every day, replacing the legos and football cards they traded only a couple of years prior. Big tobacco companies knowingly marketed these products to kids- and now my friends are nicotine addicts.

One look at some of the labels on flavored tobacco products would debunk the claims that e-cigarettes are meant for users trying to quit a nicotine addiction. Rather, it’s clear they seek a new, younger demographic to exploit. Bright, neon colors and mesmerizing patterns make flavored tobacco boxes look like candy wrappers. Combined with the use of teenage models to promote these products on social media, and these companies built a vape culture- and Maryland’s kids took the bait. Vapes have become so popular that these companies no longer need to advertise, because the kids will sell their products to each other. Another common misconception is that e-cigarettes are safer than regular cigarettes. They’re not. Vapes contain ultrafine particles, heavy metals and cancer-causing chemicals, which can harm the brain and immune system. These ingredients also make people more susceptible to COVID-19. Raising the consumption age to 21 was a good start, but it barely deterred the spread of nicotine in schools. If you do not vote to ban these flavored tobacco products, more kids will get hooked, and these shady corporations will continue to profit off of minors’ nicotine addictions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Walter Donoughe
Maryland Youth Against Tobacco Coalition