

Opposition to SB177

My name is Candice Gott, I am a small business owner in Charles, Anne Arundel, Calvert and St. Mary's counties. I am a member of the Maryland Vapor Alliance and consider myself an upstanding citizen to my community.

I am also a former cigarette smoker. At the ripe young age of 15 I became addicted to cigarettes. I did not care what flavor or type of cigarette I was using. I did it because my friends were doing it and I wanted to look cool and rebellious. That old statement "beggars cannot be choosers" applies as much today as it did when I was a teenager. Simply put, if you take flavors away from responsible adults to stop teens from experimenting, teens will continue to experiment with what is available to them.

Speaking of, the products teens tend to get their hands on are big tobacco products such as Juul and Vuse per the CDC. These products are sold in convenience stores and have a level of 5% nicotine. The typical nicotine content sold in a vape shop is 0.3% (less than a percent!). Flavors are NOT the problem. The really bad news is that if flavors are banned, vape shops would cease to exist. This means the only remaining products would be the high nicotine big tobacco products sold at convenience stores. There would be no option for lowering your nicotine content over time. Adults using a 0.3% nicotine would be forced to use 5% nicotine if they wanted to continue to vape. This would send some back to cigarettes, but many more to the black market or a different state to buy flavored products from a vape shop.

Last year T21 and a ban on flavored pods went into effect. As youth use has significantly declined, I have to wonder why we are still trying to punish adults who use this method to sustain from cigarettes. When an adult is trying to quit smoking, the last thing they want is a tobacco flavor (yes tobacco is a flavor!) because it is exactly what they are trying to move away from. Tobacco flavors are a constant reminder it is much easier to stop by a C-store and grab a pack of smokes. This type of legislation literally conditions people to tobacco. Why would we want to condition ANYONE to a tobacco flavor? We should not be normalizing tobacco.

After smoking for 15 years and trying every approved cessation product to quit, I finally stopped by a vape shop. I used green apple to quit and I have not had a cigarette since the day I found my flavor.

I knew if I could quit smoking cigarettes using this method, that anyone could. It's the reason I used every penny I had to open my vape shop. After almost 7 years of business I have no doubt that I have helped thousands quit combustible cigarettes because of flavored e-liquids. Long before big tobacco stomped into our industry and made a very large mess, I was helping adults quit combustible cigarettes with flavored e-liquids.

The saddest part of this legislation is it punishes the good actors. Maryland vape shops continue to show they consistently pass compliance checks and do not sell to underage people.

Per an article published in BMC's harm reduction journal, a study was conducted on 22,411 adults and the findings were that access to a variety of non-tobacco flavored e-liquid is the incentive in assisting adults to use e-cigarettes in place of traditional cigarettes. Restricting the availability of flavors will cause adults to go back to smoking or resort to looking for items on a black market.

There are more and more studies coming out every day that shows vaping is less harmful than traditional cigarettes and that flavors are the driving incentive to kick the habit.

I'd like to reiterate again on the black market there will be no quality control, ID Checks, or collected taxes.

I'm urging the Maryland lawmakers to work with responsible vape shop owners and the Maryland Vapor Alliance. If you pass this bill, Maryland will be looking for ways to back-pedal and undo insurmountable damage in the coming years, much similar to how marijuana and alcohol prohibition has played out. Not only will this legislation not solve the problem, it will close many small businesses in a climate where many people are already struggling due to the pandemic. This legislation will put many out of a job, and cause a large black market (as seen in other states with similar laws).

My business is my livelihood and it helps people. I have nothing to hide. Please visit my vape shop or use me as a resource for questions. We want to work with advocates and lawmakers to understand our industry and help pass fair and sensible regulations/laws.

Very respectfully,

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