

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 to support SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition." Our coalition is composed of many youth-led organizations that are both county-wide such as the Montgomery County Student Government Association (MCR-SGA) and state-wide such as Maryland Youth For Change.

Flavored tobacco products are a risk for all age groups and especially adolescents since teens are at the developmental stage of low impulse control and a lack of behavioral breaks. This disposition to engaging in risks can draw them to vices like nicotine and combined with flavored products that not only deliver nicotine, but with a more pleasant flavor as well, these products pose huge risks.

Today, I am 16. I remember being in middle school, when I was the age of 12 and hearing the "scandalous stories" and being witness to my peers accidentally dropping their Juuls, their vape pens, and their tobacco products within the classroom. At the time we all thought it was gossip, (evidence of us not really knowing the harms), but I now realize how dangerous it was and still is for these products to have a regular presence at school. What now shocks me is the influence Juul had with us being so young but it is still possible that I can clearly recall multiple instances of these incidents happening. There was little to no research available to the general public on Juul's adverse effects at the time and Juul was being marketed as "safe." Everybody around me that was vaping believed that it had little to no side effects and was virtually okay to use.

I remember people my age and around my age during my freshman year engaging in mini-debates on which flavors were better and which ones were worse, mint apparently being a divisive one since some felt that it tasted like toothpaste. They had used enough flavored tobacco products to be able to engage in mini-debates over which flavor was more pleasant.

My freshman year of high school, there was a boy named *Blake in one of my classes and he always, without fail, had a Juul in his jacket pocket. One day, me and my friends had taken a trip to Rockville Town Centre during our school lunch time which was nothing out of the ordinary. Blake was walking ahead with his friends, and suddenly me and my friends were hit in the face with a small cloud of fruit flavored smoke from Blake's Juul, as he was exhaling behind him and the wind direction didn't help.

I also remember *Dara, a girl in my grade that I also met my freshman year. She liked to talk about herself sometimes and things she did. One of them being that she was already gifted an old vape pen from a close friend (that she had been using) so she wanted a dab pen for her birthday. She talked about how she vaped in her room and what she did to clear the scents out; how she tried to do it in the bathroom instead of the bedroom so her parents wouldn't find out.

Big Tobacco targets and aggressively advertises to minority communities, and minors with their flavored products. The area that I've grown up in from birth to now has been an area predominated by Black and Brown people. I've seen this advertising firsthand and have seen its effects on my peers around me. Starting today, we can make a change and make sure that less people, especially children are addicted to nicotine. I urge you to support the passage of a clean SB 177 - "Business Regulation - Flavored Tobacco Products - Prohibition."

Respectfully Submitted,

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All names have been changed for privacy concerns.