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"Creating Committed Christians"

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Senator Mary Washington
James Senate Office building
Room 102
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Maryland Senate Bill 177
Bill Title: Flavored Tobacco Products

Senator Mary Washington

I write this letter to my opposition against SB 177, prohibiting the lawful sale of flavored tobacco and menthol cigarettes.

If legislation is passed to ban menthol smoking, it will not be good for persons of color. I am 100% against smoking of any kind and especially smoking among teenagers. I feel strongly, another method for stopping persons from smoking, should be utilized such as; education, smoke cessation classes, a direct and intense marketing campaign for helping persons, to know the deadly and destructive consequences of smoking.

Forcing and legislating the behavior of adults has never worked since abortion, to the present and even before abortion. What adults chooses to do, is what they do. Providing comprehensive education strategies for young people and adults, will yield far better results than callous and insensitive banning legislation. We perish for a lack of knowledge.

If banning legislation prevails, persons of color will be impacted super negatively;

1. Banning will criminalized menthol cigarettes and will create an

underground black market, like never before. For many the black market will not be unground but open air distribution.

2. Arrests and incarcerations will skyrocket beyond most misdemeanor crimes. What occurred in New York with Eric Garner, could happen again and again in Maryland.

3. Those being arrested will find themselves with arrest records that could prevent future meaningful employment or terminate employment for those who are working.

4. Profiling persons of color would advance to a new level among some police persons. Given all the current complications and disputes we have with negative police encounters in African American communities, passing this legislation would give law enforcement agents another portal to frisk and stop, persons of color, if seen smoking. Menthol and non-menthol smoking is very difficult to determine by untrained persons.

Be clear, we are against smoking of any kind but banning is not the way to go. Let's consider redirecting the energy into educating, awareness and sound strategies that will help a person to understand why tobacco smoking is not good. We did it for AIDS/HIV and other harmful behavior in our community and we should consider this approach for this present generation of tobacco users. We perish for a lack of knowledge, awareness and not criminalization.



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