



January 27, 2022

Dear Senate Finance Committee Members,

My name is Julian (Blackie) Wills and I am the President and CEO for Dash In Convenience Stores, a Maryland-based company with 41 outlets in the state.

I felt it was necessary for me to write this letter because I am very concerned about SB 99, which repeals preemption on the sales and marketing of tobacco products. Tobacco is one of the many items we sell at Dash In (in addition to prepared food and beverage and general convenience items) and we take the responsibility of selling tobacco very seriously. We are fully committed to keeping tobacco products out of the hands of underage youth. Adolescent use of tobacco or any adult substance is something no one in the convenience industry supports. In fact, we are proud partners with organizations like We Card who work everyday to educate our employees on the necessity of age verification and we have scanning technology in our outlets to verify customer age for age-restricted products.

However, the answer to youth usage of tobacco products is not SB 99. If passed, SB 99 will give cities and counties the ability to close convenience stores with a single vote. We respect all elected officials, but no elected official should have the ability to permanently shutter a business for doing no wrong.

You may believe this sounds severe, but tobacco products make up a large percentage of sales for every convenience store, albeit at very thin profit margins. The profit margins we make on tobacco helps fund investments like new locations, more jobs, and environmentally friendly innovations in fuel and store infrastructure. If enough cities and counties pass onerous measures like menthol bans, wintergreen bans, and even complete prohibitions that profit will erode and eventually we will be forced to close our doors leaving thousands of our associates without a career. Even worse, the loss of one store's sales will simply transfer to another store outside of city, county, or even state lines where the products remain legal. This could result in illegal contraband being transferred across the lines of municipalities which could further exacerbate a black market for these types of products. And not only will small businesses close, but the state will lose out on much needed tobacco excise taxes.

The use of tobacco products is a decision that adults have the right to decide. The people of Maryland did not elect state officials to have them dictate which products they can and can't buy. Conversely, they elected those officials to help our economy and businesses grow so they can continue to support their communities. If you are anything like me, you believe that the best way to grow the well-being of a community is to support local businesses to create jobs. Therefore, I strongly urge you to oppose SB 99 for the reasons stated above.

I am available to chat if you would like to discuss this proposal any further. Thank you for your time and thank you in advance for being a champion of small business.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'JBW'.

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