

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

As a small business owner in the state of Maryland, I am incredibly frustrated to hear that you are proposing a ban on flavored tobacco. This proposal is reckless and has the potential to devastate small business owners and customers alike.

I take pride in offering a wide variety of goods and products, including tobacco products, to the customers in my community. People rely on my store just as much as I rely on their business to support my family.

Like most convenience store owners, tobacco products account for one-third of my inside sales. If you implement this flavor ban, you will be killing the majority of my tobacco sales. I cannot even imagine how this revenue hit would impact my store's ability to stay open.

The typical cycle of a customer in my store is as follows: a customer enters the store and asks, "Do you have Newport & Marlboro Menthol?" They then go to the ATM to draw money, buy soda and chips, come to the register, ask for some lottery tickets and tobacco products, and finally pay for gas before walking out happily.

Loss of business -ATM-Soda-Lottery-Tobacco-Gas

Any regulation that further attacks my sales will force me to take drastic action such as laying off employees, raising prices, and possibly closing my doors for good. This is not taking into consideration the 40-year high in inflation right now. You know as well as I do how hard things are today, with no sign of much relief on the horizon.

As a legislator, it is your job to support policies that grow our tax base without killing small businesses, jobs, and Maryland's safety net. For evidence, you do not have to look further than the cautionary tale of Massachusetts and soon-to-be California. The Bay State lost hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue, and worse yet, overall tobacco use hardly declined.

Your actions will only generate more tax revenue for states like Virginia, Delaware, West Virginia, or Pennsylvania. You may think this statement is bold, but the demand does not disappear if you ban flavored tobacco products. Instead, it transfers to other states, which is precisely what happened in Massachusetts.

I am scared that if you implement this ban, the same thing will happen to my store and other businesses here in Maryland. Please reconsider this reckless proposal and stand with Maryland small business owners, who have already undertaken a significant financial burden during this pandemic, and do not continue making Maryland a mockery of its already hostile business climate.

I am a responsible retailer, and I do my part to keep tobacco out of the hands of Maryland youth. Please do not punish me by limiting access to my store's most popular goods.

I urge you to stand with Maryland's small and local business owners and vote NO on this proposal.

Sincerely,
Rakesh Gandhi
Owner, Aashiwaad LLC