



American Lung Association Testimony Senate Bill 273

Finance Committee

January 28, 2021

Oppose

Chairwoman Kelley and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 273, Electronic Smoking Device Regulation Act of 2021 sponsored by the Senator Kramer. The American Lung Association strongly opposes this bill as any policy to address flavored tobacco must be comprehensive and include all flavors and all products. We would encourage the committee to instead support Senate Bill 177, also before the committee which as written with no exemptions or amendments would remove all flavored tobacco products from the market in Maryland.

The American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease, through research, education and advocacy. The work of the American Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to improve the air we breathe; to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families; and to eliminate tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases.

In new data from the 2020 National Tobacco Youth Survey, e-cigarette use among high school and middle school students continue to show epidemic levels. The data shows that 23.6% of high school users have used e-cigarettes in the last month and 6.7% of middle school students. This equals more than 4.47 million middle and high school students who now use e-cigarettes. The tobacco industry has continued to target youth users with marketing of flavored products which have made them appealing for youth users to initiate tobacco use, with many youth not realizing that these products contain nicotine and then struggling with a lifetime of addiction. The other alarming rate is 16.2% among students reported using any tobacco product and 8.2% of students are reporting using multiple tobacco products. The Lung Association is encouraging states to look at evidence-based policy measures to address this epidemic. It is critical that all flavored products are included in any legislation as if you leave one product on the market youth may just switch to that product. Any legislative measure must include all flavors and all products, which include but are not limited to e-cigarettes, menthol cigarettes, hookah, cigars and smokeless products.

While much attention has been focused on how e-cigarettes are now attracting and addicting Maryland residents, many other flavored tobacco products have been on the market for decades. The tobacco industry has a long history of targeting communities of color, LGBTQ communities and communities of low socioeconomic status with the sale of menthol cigarettes and flavored cigarillos.

Menthol is not only a flavoring, but a chemical with complex, drug-like properties that can impact smoking initiation, addiction and cessation. Menthol has cooling and anesthetic properties which reduce the harshness of cigarette smoke for new smokers. Menthol also reduces airway pain and irritation and can suppress coughing, which can mask the early warning symptoms of smoking-induced respiratory problems. Use of menthol cigarettes by youth also makes it more likely that youth will go on to become regular smokers. While overall cigarette sales have been declining, the proportion of smokers using menthol cigarettes has been increasing, and over half of kids who smoke cigarettes use menthol cigarettes.

Removing all flavored tobacco products would be a critical component to a comprehensive strategy to reduce tobacco use and prevent initiation and lifelong addiction. Ensuring that all flavored tobacco products are included in any policy measure will benefit Maryland communities of color, LGBTQ communities, and communities of lower socioeconomic status by reducing tobacco use and saving lives. Senate Bill 273 does not go far enough, and we urge you to make sure no communities are left behind and focus on comprehensive policy measures which must include all flavors and all products.

The Lung Association thanks the Maryland General Assembly for their continued commitment to the health and wellbeing of the residents of Maryland and the desire to protect Maryland youth from a lifelong tobacco and nicotine addiction. Unfortunately, Senate Bill 273 is not the solution and the Lung Association would encourage the committee to vote no and support a more comprehensive approach that includes all flavors and all products.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aleks Casper". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aleks Casper
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