

## Support with amendments SB273

My name is Candice Gott, I am a small business owner in the community and a member of the Maryland Vapor Alliance.

I became addicted to cigarettes at the age of 15. In an attempt to fit in and look cool in front of my friends I develop a nasty habit. I cannot tell you what type of cigarettes I started using, because I used whatever was available to me. Beggars cannot be choosers and this statement rings true today. If you take flavors away from responsible adults to stop teens from experimenting, teens will continue to experiment with what is available to them.

Data from the FDA shows that vape shops in Maryland are doing their part and not selling to people who are underage. Maryland vape shops continue to pass compliance checks while convenience stores and other retail establishments that are not age-gated continue to fail compliance checks.

Also per data from the CDC, the item teens are experimenting with the most is big tobacco products such as Juul and Vuse. These products are sold in convenience stores and are sold in 5% nicotine. The typical nicotine content sold in a vape shop is 0.3% (less than a percent!). Flavors are NOT the problem. The really bad news is that if flavors are banned, vape shops would cease to exist. This means the only remaining products would be the high nicotine big tobacco products sold at convenience stores. There would be no option for lowering your nicotine content over time. Adults using a level of 0.3% nicotine would be forced to use 5% nicotine if they wanted to continue to vape. This would send some back to cigarettes, but many more to the black market or a different state to buy flavored products from a vape shop. This is absolutely why we support this bill with the proposed amendments. We believe age-gated dedicated vape shops will take extra care in making sure a valid ID is scanned and that a straw purchase is not happening.

T21 and a ban on flavored pods took effect last year. This dropped youth use significantly. SB273 with the proposed amendments helps to address the real problem at hand and offers a solution that still allows adults access to a lifesaving product. This bill with the proposed amendments will stop a black market from forming, and stop adults from going back to a product that kills 500K each year. If we do not protect flavors in vape shops the only option for consumers is high nicotine big tobacco products sold in convenience stores.

Vaping is the only thing that worked for me to quit smoking, and I tried it all, from gums, to pills and patches... I even tried being hypnotized. I knew if I could quit smoking cigarettes using this method, that anyone could. This is the reason I opened my vape shop. I wanted to help others quit smoking.

This legislation if passed with the approved amendments acknowledges that Maryland vape shops continue to show they consistently pass compliance checks and do not sell to underage people. The bill addresses many of the sensible and fair regulations that Maryland vape shop owners have been asking for since big tobacco entered our industry and made a very large mess. This bill with the proposed amendments helps small business in a time when many businesses are already suffering and addresses the problem with real and viable solutions.

There are more and more studies coming out every day that shows vaping is less harmful than traditional cigarettes and that flavors are the driving incentive to kick the habit.

I'm urging the Maryland lawmakers to work with responsible vape shop owners and the Maryland Vapor Alliance. My business is my livelihood and it helps people. I have nothing to hide. Please visit my vape shop or use me as a resource for questions. We want to work with advocates and lawmaker to understand our industry and help pass fair and sensible regulations/laws.

Very respectfully,

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