



For Immediate Release
November 18, 2020

Contact:

Kate Austin, The Hatcher Group, kaustin@thehatchergroup.com, 703.868.2255

Faith, Health, and Community Leaders Launch Campaign to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products in Maryland

Coalition calls for legislation to protect Maryland youth and stop the exploitation of Black and Brown communities

(Annapolis, MD) – Faith & Community Against Flavored Tobacco — a wide-ranging coalition of over 40 faith leaders, community groups, health advocates, parents, unions, and lawmakers from across the state — today launched its campaign to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products in Maryland. The [coalition](#) is calling on the Maryland General Assembly to pass legislation to be sponsored by Senator Mary L. Washington (D-43) and Delegate Jazz Lewis (D-24) that would remove all flavored tobacco products from the market, including menthol cigarettes, flavored electronic smoking devices—also known as e-cigarettes and vapes—cigars, and smokeless tobacco.

“Today, Marylanders from all faiths, political leanings, races, and regions of the state are here to tell Big Tobacco: We will not stand by while you attempt to lure yet another generation into a lifetime of tobacco addiction, disease, and death,” said coalition member Ryan Turner, Executive Director of Community Law in Action (CLIA). “We reject the tobacco industry’s multi-million-dollar barrage of lies and vow to stop them from further exploiting our kids and Black and Brown lives for profit.”

Flavored tobacco products lure kids into a life-long struggle with deadly tobacco addiction, hooking them on products targeted to them in flavors like minty menthol, glazed donut, gummy bear, and cotton candy. Twenty-three percent of Maryland high school students currently use e-cigarettes, a rate five times higher than adult use, and 80 percent of teens who have ever used tobacco started with a flavored product.

“As a parent who has seen firsthand the enormous toll that the youth vaping epidemic has taken on so many Maryland families, including my own, I cannot stand idly by while Big Tobacco hooks the next generation of addicts, using flavored tobacco products as their way in,” said Maryland parent and Parents Against Vaping e-Cigs (PAVe) member Donna Bartlett. “It’s time for Maryland to protect our kids and end the sale of all flavored products.”

For 50 years, the tobacco industry has targeted Black and Brown communities with their predatory marketing of flavored tobacco products, namely menthol cigarettes. As a result, a staggering 85 percent of all African American smokers and seven out of 10 African American youth smokers smoke menthol cigarettes, resulting in a disproportionate burden of tobacco-related disease and death. African Americans are more likely to die from tobacco-related causes than any other race or ethnic group.

"Menthol and tobacco have proven to be a deadly combination for the Black community. We can no longer permit Big Tobacco to profit from flavored products that lure children into the trap of nicotine addiction and put vulnerable populations in peril," said President of the Baltimore NAACP, Reverend Kobi Little. "I am proud to stand with faith and justice leaders from across the state to call on the Maryland General Assembly to stop Big Tobacco in its predatory tracks and ban menthol and other flavored tobacco products."

Research shows limited evidence that e-cigarettes are effective in helping smokers quit, and they are not approved by the FDA as a smoking cessation tool. The [U.S. Surgeon General](#) has concluded that youth use of tobacco in any form, including e-cigarettes, is unsafe, causes addiction, and can harm adolescent brain development, which impacts attention, memory, impulse control, mood, and learning. A recent Stanford University School of Medicine [study](#) also found that young people who vaped were five to seven times more likely to be infected by COVID-19 than those who did not use e-cigarettes.

"As a founding member of Smoke Free Maryland, The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi) is excited to join this important coalition working to pass legislation removing flavored tobacco products from the market," explained MedChi CEO Gene M. Ransom III. "These dangerous products inherently target children and have no societal value. Prohibiting their sale will protect the health of our families, friends, and neighbors and improve the public health of Maryland."

The coalition says the federal government has failed to protect kids from flavored tobacco, only restricting flavors in some types of electronic smoking devices, leaving countless flavored tobacco products – including menthol cigarettes — [widely available for use by kids](#).

Similar legislation ending the sale of flavored tobacco had strong support during the [2020 Maryland General Assembly](#), but the bill fell victim to the abbreviated schedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Read a fact sheet about the impact of flavored tobacco [here](#).

Marylanders interested in supporting Faith & Community Against Flavored Tobacco are encouraged to:

- Register to participate in flavored tobacco virtual town halls
[Dec. 15 at 7 PM, Baltimore Metro](#)
[Dec. 17 at 7 PM, DC Metro](#)
- [Contact your legislator](#) and urge their support for this issue
- Show your support on social media: [Twitter](#) (@TobaccoFreeMD) and [Facebook](#)

###

Faith & Community Against Flavored Tobacco coalition members include: American Lung; NAACP, Maryland State Chapter; PAVE; Maryland PIRG; Advocates for Children and Youth; Maryland Association of School Health Nurses; Maryland Public Health Association; Maryland GASP; Maryland PTA; Center for Black Equity; SEIU 1199; Healthcare for All; MedChi; AFSCME Council 3; Baltimore Teachers Union; Union Baptist Church; Communities United; Jubilee Arts; Community Law in Action; Roots and Raices; Douglas Memorial Church; Parent and Community Advisory Board of Baltimore; African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council; Sharp Street Memorial Church; Maryland Center for Economic Policy; UFCW Local 1994; Black Democrats of Montgomery County; Maryland Assembly of School Based Healthcare; Baltimore Jewish Council; Youth Activism Project; Gray Panthers of Metropolitan Washington DC; Am Kolel Jewish Renewal Community; Baltimore Urban Debate League; Montrose View Psychotherapy Associates; S. Hunt Aero, LLC; Braid-Forbes Health Research; Shaare Tefila Congregation; American Academy of Pediatrics; Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers; Zion Baptist Church; Bowie State University Student Athletic Advisory Committee; Greater Baltimore Urban League; Centro de Apoyo Familiar; Sister 4 Sisters Network, Inc.; Coppin Heights Community Development; The Virago Project; Bethel World Outreach Church; Shepherd's Clinic; Mentoring Male Teens in the Hood