PRESS RELEASE

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BOSTON CONVENIENCE STORE OWNERS RALLY AGAINST THE BAN OF LEGAL PRODUCTS FROM THEIR STORES

OWNERS CITE RACIAL BIAS, ILLICIT MARKET, ECONOMIC CONCERNS IN CALL TO ELECTED LEADERS FOR SENSIBLE TOBACCO REGULATIONS

Boston, MA – More than 100 convenience store owners gathered on Boston City Hall Plaza today to call for sensible tobacco regulations in Boston and across Massachusetts. Store owners highlighted the vital role their stores play in providing critical food resources for underserved communities and the responsible sale of legal age-restricted products in a regulated and permitted marketplace.

Both the Boston Public Health Commission and the Massachusetts Legislature are currently considering regulations that would ban the sale of menthol cigarettes and mint and wintergreen smokeless tobacco products from convenience stores.

“Massachusetts convenience stores are too often taken for granted. Throughout the state, these stores provide the products and services their neighbors need when they need them most, and are responsible for the collection and remittance of a significant amount of the state’s tax revenue through the sale of items such as gasoline, lottery, and tobacco,” said Jon Shaer, Executive Director for NECSEMA. “Can you imagine a day without your local convenience store?”

Richard Marianos, Assistant Director of The Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (retired), said the proposal will move products from regulated convenience stores and expand illicit tobacco sales.

“The revenue generated in Massachusetts from menthol cigarettes is over 2 billion dollars. If policymakers move forward with these regulations, there is a wide network of gangs and organized crime that will be ready to fill the void,” Marianos said. “It is almost certain that the passage of these regulations will increase criminal activity and violence in Massachusetts.”
Massachusetts is already sixth in the nation in tobacco smuggling, while in New York, officials estimate the state loses nearly $1 billion annually in lost taxes to unregulated street sales of cigarettes. In 2018, New York authorities arrested 17 smugglers who flooded the city with 18 million untaxed cigarettes.

The Boston Convenience Store Owners Association (BCSOA) and the New England Convenience Store and Energy Marketers Association (NECSEMA) say the regulations could also lead to widespread store closures, unemployment and food scarcity, and also disproportionately impact communities of color.

“City and state leaders must reject this racist, segregation era policy. It sends the message to black and minority communities that we can’t decide for ourselves what products to buy, but white people can,” said Corneal Allen of the BCSOA. “Thank you but no thanks. We are adults and we can decide for ourselves.”

“We are minorities, we are immigrants and we demand that you represent us,” added Francisco Marte, president of BCSOA.

Many of the stores impacted by the policies are in underserved neighborhoods and are frequently the only accessible location for families on government assistance to purchase food and household essentials. The proposal would put many of these stores out of business, the owners said.

Organizers also noted that Massachusetts convenience stores have a 95% Food and Drug Administration (FDA) compliance rate with underage stings.

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