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Boston Convenience Stores Protest Flavor Ban Retailers urge city to ‘Repeal and Restore Equality’

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BOSTON -- A contingent of convenience-store operators gathered outside Boston’s City Hall last Wednesday, protesting the city’s ban on flavored tobacco products. *Boston Metro* reported the Boston Convenience Store Owners Association (BCSOA) led the demonstration.

Armed with signs reading “Banning Products Kills Jobs,” “Repeal: Restore Equity” and “My Store Is 2nd Generation Not the Last,” the group said they supported tobacco reforms like the city’s decision to raise the minimum purchase age to 21, but the flavor ban goes too far.

“You can go into a liquor store and buy a flavored nip if you’re 21, but if you’re 21 and you want to smoke a vanilla-flavored cigar, you can’t do that,” Luis Blanco, the group’s spokesperson and owner of the Don Quijote Market, told *Boston Metro*. “That’s what we’re fighting for, to be on an even playing field.”

The stakes are high, with Boston retailers estimating more than 30% of sales are tobacco sales. Then there’s the additional products those tobacco shoppers pick up while in the store.

“We do serve our community—bread, cheese, milk, sugar, coffee—we have the right to serve them tobacco, too,” said BCSOA president Francisco Marte. “We’re fighting for our rights, for our business, for our stores.”

Though nearly 50 municipalities in Massachusetts have adopted similar flavor bans, consumers will still have the option to drive to cities and counties that haven’t banned flavored tobacco products.

“What if people come in to complain?” said Nabi Ahamad, who operates a store near the border of Boston and Revere. “Then my business goes to Revere. I lose my business.”

Boston city leaders acknowledged the retailers’ concerns, but remained committed to the flavor ban.

“Increasing the restrictions on the sale of flavored tobacco products are the right next step for us to be taking to protect the health of Boston’s young people,” Boston Mayor Marty Walsh said in a written statement last week. “We know the consequences of tobacco use are real and can be devastating, especially among youth, and these policy changes will protect Boston’s young people from dangerous health concerns.”

“I appreciate the concerns of the retailers and we have valued the perspective of these business owners at all stages of adopting and implementing these rules,” he said.

<http://www.cspnet.com/category-news/tobacco/articles/boston-convenience-stores-protest-flavor-ban>