



Bishop Lisa M. Weah, D.Min.

New Bethlehem Baptist Church
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The Honorable C.T. Wilson
House Economic Matters Committee, Chair
231 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen St.
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 28, 2024

RE: SB 1056 - Cigarettes, Other Tobacco Products, and Electronic Smoking
Devices - Revisions (Tobacco Retail Modernization Act of 2024)
POSITION: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Wilson,

I am writing to you as the pastor of New Bethlehem Baptist Church, living in Baltimore, to express my support for SB 1056, the Tobacco Retail Modernization Act of 2024. I support this bill because it is very important limit the access of tobacco products to youth and community of color. For decades, the tobacco industry has targeted young people and communities of color to use their products. As a result, we have generations of people who have poor health. The faith community will stand with advocates to ensure that Maryland legislators move forward laws the support community needs.

Despite progress in tobacco control, the problem of youth access to tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, remains significant. Data indicates that over 48,000 Maryland high school students **self-report** they use tobacco products, a number that likely falls short of the true total. The marketing strategies and new products like flavored e-cigarettes target and hook kids, Big Tobacco's next generation of customers.

The impact of youth tobacco use is both a public health and economic burden. Maryland incurs annual healthcare costs of approximately \$3.14 billion directly related to smoking, and 27.5% cancer-related Maryland deaths can be traced to tobacco use. We must act now to mitigate its influence on the health of our children and our communities at large.

SB 1056 proposes to impose stricter penalties on illegal sales to minors, including increased fines and potential license suspension for violators, restrict access to vapes to licensed dealers, and mandates a study on youth access to tobacco

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products. It also increases the cost of the tobacco retail license to help fund enforcement activities by our state and county agencies that help protect our communities from bad actors. These steps are crucial for developing effective healthcare and public health strategies to protect Maryland's youth and to ensure that retailers are held accountable to state and federal law.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 1056, the Tobacco Retail Modernization Act of 2024.

Thank you for your consideration and for taking a stand on behalf of our youth,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa M. Weah".

Bishop Lisa M. Weah
Pastor
The New Bethlehem Baptist Church