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Chair C.T. Wilson and Vice Chair Brian Crosby - Economic Matters Committee

I am writing to express my profound disappointment and strong opposition to House Bill 1180 (HB 1180) and corresponding Senate Bill 1056 (SB 1056), which propose to restrict the type of vendors permitted to conduct the sale of electronic smoking devices in Maryland. As a small business owner operating gas stations and convenience stores (Birdie's) in Charles and St. Mary's County, I am concerned that the legislators in support of this bill have not considered the detrimental impact this will have on our industry, our community, and our state's economy.

First and foremost, HB 1180 will create a monopoly for vape stores, eliminating all competition and unfairly favoring a specific segment of the market. By restricting the sale of electronic smoking devices to vendors exclusively dedicated to such products, these bills will unjustly disadvantage businesses like mine, which have long provided a diverse range of tobacco products to our customers. While vape and smoke shops have only recently begun appearing, convenience store operators like myself have been contributing to the growth and prosperity of Maryland's economy for several decades. It is disheartening to see the hard work of established operators be undermined and unappreciated - it is against the state's values of fostering entrepreneurship.

While I understand the state's goal of reducing youth access to tobacco and vaping products, the proposed bills do not offer a viable solution. The proposed measures fail to address the root causes of youth tobacco and vaping use and instead will likely have counterproductive consequences. Determined youth will simply seek out the approved vape vendors and access electronic smoking devices there. Others will rely on an inevitable bootleg market, where unregulated and potentially dangerous products are sold to young adults without proper ID checks.

Lastly, this bill will potentially lead to an increase in cigarette consumption as individuals will seek more accessible alternatives.

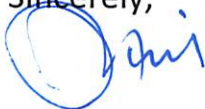
These bills will undoubtedly lead to an increase in cigarette prices, driving consumers to neighboring states like Virginia where prices are lower. This exodus of customers and revenue will have devastating consequences for Maryland's economy, further exacerbating the financial strain on small businesses already struggling to survive in an increasingly challenging economic climate.

Small businesses like mine will feel a disproportionate burden. The cumulative impact of recent regulation has been unbearable - we have already faced reductions in lottery commission percentages, expansion of family leave, increased minimum wages, and general inflation has made business operation incredibly difficult. In plain terms, Mr. Wilson, we truly do not have any more room for regulatory burdens if we want to remain sustainable.

As one of the 6,500 retailers gravely affected by these bills, I urge you to reconsider and oppose HB 1180 and SB 1056 in their current form. Instead of implementing measures that unfairly target responsible retailers and fail to achieve a real goal, I implore you to seek alternative solutions that genuinely address the problem of youth smoking while supporting the viability of small businesses and preserving a competitive marketplace.

Thank you for considering my perspective on this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Riaz Ahmad  
NSR MARTS INC | President