

Shama Patre

HB 1180 - Cigarettes, Other Tobacco Products, and Electronic Smoking Devices - Revisions
(Tobacco Retail Modernization Act of 2024)

Position: favorable

My name is Shama Patre, and I am a sophomore attending Marriotts Ridge High School in Howard County. I am testifying in favor of SB1056, the Tobacco Retail Modernization Act of 2024, and to tell you how the availability and accessibility of tobacco and electronic smoking devices have affected me. As a high schooler, I am in contact with many of my peers who regularly use ESDs, OTPs etc. I am often tempted to begin using them as well because of the people around me and the social glorification of using ESDs. It makes me feel unsafe. It makes me sad to see people fall prey to such money making schemes, people my age who have so much potential, who are wasting their time on unhealthy habits which can be stopped.

I had a good friend on the basketball team that I played on at school. She was addicted to vaping. She couldn't go a few hours without a hit. Before and after every game I would often walk in on her vaping. She'd offer me a hit at times as well. I would see the change it had on her. She waved it away, as if it was supposed to be normal and I was the one in the wrong for being concerned. I'd watch her energy deplete everyday. Her athletics and academics began to drop, while her eyes looked more and more bloodshot everyday. I watched her spend more and more time towards her addiction and she had less time to focus on other things. High school is not only the best years of your life, but also decides your future. She physically could not study and play as well as she used to. She still has not recovered from this addiction and it continues to consume a large part of her life. How is she supposed to do all the things required to get into a good college for a good future if she is consumed by tobacco constantly?

I witness students, my peers, being consumed by tobacco and vapes countless times throughout the day. It exhausts their body and you see the physical signs of the addiction they deny having. Many people I once knew are deeply changed by the ESDs they use everyday. Being surrounded by so many addicted people, I am often tempted to use as well. Vaping and tobacco use has become too normalized in today's world, especially in school. It is marketed and seen as something that you have lots of fun while doing and will miss out on if you do not participate. They way big tobacco companies make fun flavors, enticing packaging and advertisements, draws youth into these traps. This is especially detrimental to their health and can cause shortness of breath, lasting effects on brain development, and less stamina.

ESDs and OTPs shouldn't be so easily accessible to teenagers. Tobacco ads feed the notion that everyone smokes – and has lots of fun while doing it. It makes the youth feel like they're missing out. If tobacco and ESDs weren't so easy to buy, and they weren't so normalized among the youth, a lot of my peers, teenagers and kids around the world would not have their time stolen by this addiction.

Thank you State Senate Finance Committee for hearing this testimony. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.