



February 23, 2024

Testimony of Laura Hale
American Heart Association
Favorable W/ Amendments HB 1073 Tobacco Tax-Cigarettes-Rate Alteration

Dear Chair Atterbeary and Honorable Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association extends its support with amendments for HB 1073.

Raising the cigarette tax is a proven tobacco control measure that both raises needed funds for the state and will decrease tobacco use. Our concern with the current bill, is that it only raises the tax by 75 cents. For public health benefits to be seen, cigarette taxes must be increased over a dollar and we would recommend this be increased by \$1.50. This increase would raise an additional \$50.48 Million for the state.

We would also recommend increasing the tax equally across all tobacco products so that people do not switch to cheaper products rather than quit smoking. This would also bring in additional needed revenue for the state.

The benefits of this tax could move beyond tobacco control by investing the funds into needed programs such as the Healthy School Meals for All legislation. Funds from this tax could make a huge difference towards making sure that every child in Maryland could have a no cost breakfast and no cost lunch when they go to school.

The American Heart Association urges the committee to increase the tax by \$1.50, tax all products and use those funds for Healthy School Meals for All and continued Tobacco Control efforts.