

Dr. Seth Martin
Member of the American Heart Association Board
SB233- Favorable

Good Afternoon Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Dr. Seth Martin and I am testifying in strong support of SB 233.

As a cardiologist, I see the consequences of tobacco use and nicotine addiction every day – most troubling is that these consequences are completely preventable by simply never using tobacco products. As a cardiologist and a father, I strongly support SB 233 to help prevent a new generation from getting hooked on tobacco and suffering the deadly consequences of these products.

Tobacco use and nicotine addiction cause many health problems that affect the heart, arteries and lungs. At an individual level, while a heart attack or stroke are the most obvious and dramatic consequences, multiple health problems can happen due to tobacco use such as heart failure, limb amputations or walking claudication from clogged arteries, impaired breathing from COPD, lung and oral cancer, etc. Of course, these problems are not limited to the individual using a tobacco product, it can also impact those around them. The aerosols in these products contain several chemicals known to be toxic. Some aerosols contain heavy metals and other toxic ingredients

Additionally, flavored tobacco products are hooking a new generation of kids due to enticing flavors like mint, mango, and bubble gum. Research tells us 80% of teens who use tobacco cite flavors as the reason they started. This is devastating since public health interventions and social changes had driven teen tobacco use to record low levels. Yet, for e-cigarette alone use has risen 135% in just 2 years and now over 6 million kids are using tobacco, the highest rate since 2000.

This is particularly troubling because of the impact of nicotine on the developing adolescent brain. E-cigarettes can contain very high levels of nicotine. Nicotine is a neurotoxin, a poison that affects the nervous system. It can affect brain development from early fetal life through adolescence, permanently changing the ability to think or reason. Consequences for teens exposed to nicotine include impacts on cognitive ability, emotional problems, and addiction.

For all these reasons, it is critical that we do everything we can to make tobacco use less appealing to youth and to create more never smokers. Taking away all flavored tobacco products does just that.

It is also important that this policy not just focus on flavored e-cigarettes, but also include menthol cigarettes and all flavored tobacco products. Tobacco companies have targeted African-American and low-income communities for decades hooking them on menthol and nicotine.

Nicotine and tobacco are serious addictions. As a cardiologist working in Maryland, I am passionate about ensuring that we do everything we can to prevent people from starting to use tobacco or to help them quit.

This legislation will help keep dangerous, addictive products away from kids and those who have been targeted by the tobacco industry. Your support is critical to help decrease tobacco use and nicotine addiction, prevent deaths and disabilities, and save millions in health care costs including Maryland Medicaid.

For all these reasons, and for the health and welfare of all Marylanders, I ask for swift passage of SB 233. We must continue to do everything we can to help all residents, especially kids and communities of color to stop using tobacco or to never start. Thank you.