



February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Testimony of Laura Hale  
American Heart Association

**Oppose SB 508: St. Mary's County - Possession of Tobacco Product or Electronic Smoking Device by an Individual Under the Age of 21 Years - Prohibition**

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Laura Hale and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association. The American Heart Association offers our strong opposition to SB 508.

Last year, the General Assembly reviewed the personal use and possession language in the Tobacco 21 legislation. Upon review of the literature it is noted that these types of laws are ineffective at stopping youth from smoking and they can move key resources away from enforcing the law with the retailers<sup>1</sup>. It is much more effective to stop youth smoking by stopping adults from ever selling to those under 21.

Furthermore, programs that penalize youth may deter them from seeking cessation services<sup>2</sup>. Thus, these programs may keep youth from trying to quit and getting the help they need for fear of being arrested.

Targeting youth for possession of these products is ineffective and may lead to teens not trying to quit. The American Heart Association urges an unfavorable report on SB 508 as it will not stop youth from using these products. Enforcement is most effective at the retail level where you are punishing adults for selling to those underage.

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<sup>1</sup> Wakefield, M, and Giovino, G, "Teen penalties for tobacco possession, use, and purchase: evidence and issues," *Tobacco Control*, 12(Suppl 1):i6-i13, 2003; Jason, LA, et al., "Youth Tobacco Sales-to-Minors and Possession-Use-Purchase Laws: A Public Health Controversy," *J Drug Education*, 35(4):275-290, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Hrywna, M, et al., "Content Analysis and Key Informant Interviews to Examine Community Response to the Purchase, Possession, and/or Use of Tobacco by Minors," *J Comm Health*, 29(3):209-216, 2004; Wakefield, M, and Giovino, G, "Teen penalties for tobacco possession, use, and purchase: evidence and issues," *Tobacco Control*, 12(Suppl 1):i6-i13, 2003; Loukas, A, et al., "Examining the Perspectives of Texas Minors Cited for Possession of Tobacco," *Health Promotion Practice*, 7(2):197-205, 2006.