



Delegate C.T. Wilson
Economic Matters Committee, Chairman
Lowe House Office Building, Room 231
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

February 20, 2024

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

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Wilson,

I am writing to you as a Dagmawit Assefa, student/youth advocate, to express my support for HB 1180, the Tobacco Retail Modernization Act of 2024. I am especially grateful to the Chairman of this committee for his leadership in sponsoring the bill. Despite progress in tobacco control, the problem of youth access to tobacco products, including flavored tobacco and e-cigarettes, remains significant. Data indicates that over 48,000 Maryland high school students self-report that they use tobacco products, a number that likely falls short of the true total. The marketing strategies and new products like flavored e-cigarettes target and hook kids, Big Tobacco's next generation of customers.

The impact of youth tobacco use is both a public health and economic burden. Maryland incurs annual healthcare costs of approximately \$3.14 billion directly related to smoking, and 27.5% cancer-related Maryland deaths can be traced to tobacco use. We must act now to mitigate its influence on the health of our children and our communities at large.

HB 1180 proposes to impose stricter penalties on illegal sales to minors, including increased fines and potential license suspension for violators, restrict access to vapes to licensed dealers, and mandates a study on youth access to tobacco products. It also increases the cost of the tobacco retail license to help fund enforcement activities by our state and county agencies that help protect our communities from bad actors. These steps are crucial for developing effective healthcare and public health strategies to protect Maryland's youth.

The need for such legislation is broadly recognized, with eighty-one percent of Maryland voters supporting action against Big Tobacco to safeguard our children. I urge you to vote in favor of HB 1180, the Tobacco Retail Modernization Act of 2024.

Thank you for your consideration and for taking a stand with me.

Sincerely,
Dagmawit Assefa
Youth Activism Project