

# MARYLAND STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS

January 23, 2024

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The Honorable Pamela Beidle  
Chair, Senate Finance Committee  
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

**RE: SB 220 - Public Health - Public Health Services and Protections - Revisions**

Dear Chair Beidle:

The Maryland State Advisory Council on Health and Wellness (the Council) is submitting this letter of support for Senate Bill 220 (SB 220), titled: "Public Health - Public Health Services and Protections – Revisions." The purpose of SB 220 would be to update or repeal several sections of obsolete statute governing Maryland Department of Health (MDH) programs. This includes updating the State tobacco 21 law to remove the exemption allowing the sale of tobacco products to active-duty military members under the age of 21.

The Council supports SB 220 as it brings Maryland into compliance with federal tobacco youth access laws. In 2019, both Maryland and the US federal government enacted laws that raised the minimum legal sales age for all tobacco products from 18 to 21 years old. The Maryland law that went into effect on October 1, 2019 included a military exemption which permits tobacco retailers to sell tobacco products to active-military service members ages 18 to 20 with a valid military identification. Under the federal law, however, it is illegal for a retailer to sell any tobacco product to an individual under age 21, with no exceptions. Because there are no exemptions in the federal law any states with a military exemption, including Maryland, are violating the federal law. In addition, the differences between the federal and state laws complicate efforts for tobacco retailers to comply with, and government agencies enforce, tobacco sales laws in Maryland. SB 220 will reduce confusion for retailers, making it easier for them to comply with the law.

It is important to note special resources do exist for service members and veterans who use tobacco products and want to quit. In fact, individuals who currently use and are ready to quit tobacco products, including electronic smoking devices, can contact the Maryland Tobacco Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW), a free service that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, year-round to Marylanders ages 13 years and older. More information is available at [www.SmokingStopsHere.com](http://www.SmokingStopsHere.com). Also, military veterans with health insurance through the US Department of Veterans Affairs can call 1-855-QUIT-VET (1-855-784-8838). Additional resources are available through the Department of Defense and the "You Can Quit 2" campaign at <https://www.ycq2.org/>.

The Council recognizes there are other aspects of the bill that impact the Department, and respectfully urges this Committee to approve SB 220 as it seeks to ensure the State of Maryland consistently implements best practices for preventing youth access to and use of tobacco products, including military service members under the age of 21.

Sincerely,

*Teresa Titus-Howard*

Teresa Titus-Howard, PhD, MHA, MSW, CCM  
Chair, State Advisory Council on Health and Wellness