



March 1st, 2026

Testimony of Laura Hale
American Heart Association

**Support of HB 918 Baltimore City - Cigarettes, Other Tobacco Products, and Electronic Smoking Devices -
Local Laws Authorization**

Dear Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and Honorable Members of the Economic Matters Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. 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 support of SB 279.

Localities in Maryland have long been a partner with the state in the fight against big tobacco. We support all localities, including Baltimore City to have the authority to regulate tobacco control (stronger than the state.) Without the local authority to enact and enforce tobacco control laws, Maryland's local governments will not be able to respond to the unique drivers of tobacco use in their jurisdictions. The High School Tobacco Use Rate in Maryland is 15.9 percent¹, a number that has climbed in recent years. To protect Maryland's youth from the dangers of tobacco use, local governments must be able to rectify a recent Court of Appeals decision that calls into question their ability to regulate the sale and distribution of tobacco products at the local level.

In 2013, the Maryland Court of Appeals held that state law preempts local regulation of minimum packaging requirements for cigars, the effect of which has limited our authority to pass and enforce laws regulating the sale and distribution of tobacco products. *Altadis U.S.A., Inc., et al. v. Prince George's County, Maryland*, 431 Md. 307, (2013). The holding turns on the existence of certain provisions in the State Business Regulation Article relating to cigar packaging even though those state provisions were enacted after the local laws in question and even after oral argument in this matter. Unfortunately, this decision contains broad language concerning state preemption of the local authority to enact and enforce laws regulating the sale and distribution of tobacco products. This language has resulted in local jurisdictions being threatened with lawsuits if they continue to enforce and enact and enforce tobacco laws that appropriately address the specific challenges of their community.

Maryland cities and counties need to be able to fight back against big tobacco. This bill allows Baltimore City to do this. The American Heart Association urges a swift and favorable report on SB 279.

¹ <https://www.lung.org/research/sotc/state-grades/highlights/maryland>