

**JOE VOGEL**  
*Legislative District 17*  
Montgomery County

Ways and Means Committee

*Subcommittees*

Education

Revenues



The Maryland House of Delegates  
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**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB 144: Maryland Fair Pricing and Competition Enforcement Act**

Economic Matters Committee

Tuesday, February 10th - 1:00 PM

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

For much of the twentieth century, enforcement of the Robinson–Patman Act prevented large buyers from receiving preferential pricing and perks that small businesses could not access. That enforcement mattered, allowing independent grocery stores, pharmacies, and other local retailers to purchase goods on fair terms, compete on price, and serve their communities.

Since the 1980s, however, the federal agencies responsible for enforcement have allowed buyer coercion to proliferate. As a result, manufacturers and dominant retailers have been free to engage in price discrimination that advantages scale over competition. Small businesses are charged more for the same goods, squeezing their already-thin margins. To be clear, this is not the result of consumer preference; it is the predictable outcome of weakened antitrust enforcement. Given the continued lack of meaningful federal enforcement, states must play a more active role in preserving competitive markets.

HB 144 responds to this reality by strengthening Maryland’s capacity to enforce fair pricing and competition laws at the state level. The bill establishes the Fair Pricing and Market Competition Fund, a non-lapsing special fund within the Office of the Attorney General, subject to oversight by the Treasurer and Comptroller. The fund is dedicated exclusively to supporting the Antitrust Division’s enforcement of laws governing price discrimination, monopolistic conduct, and unfair competition.

The consequences of unchecked, consolidated corporate power are visible across Maryland. Small, family-owned businesses that once operated alongside larger chains have disappeared. As local stores close, competition declines, prices rise, and entire neighborhoods are left with fewer options for groceries and prescription drugs. These dynamics contribute directly to food and pharmacy deserts that disproportionately harm working families, seniors, and rural residents.

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HB 144 requires sustained investment in enforcement capacity by providing additional investigative staff for the Antitrust Division. Rather than diverting general revenues, the fund is self-sustaining with civil penalties, damages, and attorney's fees recovered in antitrust actions reinvested into antitrust enforcement. These resources are likely to supplement existing funding, ensuring that enforcement capacity is meaningfully expanded rather than reshuffled. This recognizes a basic truth: antitrust laws are only as effective as the resources dedicated to enforcing them.

A Fair Pricing and Competition Fund would ensure Marylanders do not pay for federal inaction. This bill promotes fair markets, protects local businesses, and helps ensure Marylanders have access to affordable goods and real consumer choice.

**I urge the Committee to give a favorable report on HB 144.**