

Candice Gott  
Vape Jungle  
Maryland Business Owner and Constituent

Members of the Economic Matters Committee, I am respectfully requesting a favorable report on SB 249. I am a Maryland vape shop owner who has been operating legally for over 12 years. I support reasonable regulation that preserves this industry for businesses that follow the law and ensures adult access to regulated products. SB 249 is narrowly focused and intentionally limited in scope. It does not attempt to solve every issue in this industry. Instead, it establishes a foundational requirement that every retailer selling these products be properly licensed. Without universal licensure, regulators cannot accurately identify who is selling these products, enforce existing laws, or address noncompliance. At present, many smoke and tobacco shops, which are distinct from licensed vape shops, operate outside the law by avoiding licensing requirements and taxes. This creates a significant imbalance for compliant businesses. The Maryland Vapor Alliance conducted a randomized compliance buy of 50 smoke shops across the state, and only two were paying the proper taxes. This allows noncompliant retailers to sell the same products for several dollars less simply because they are not following the law. When consumers are faced with higher prices, explanations about compliance and legality are often ignored, particularly in today's economy. Customers go where it is cheapest, even if that business is operating unlawfully. We cannot continue to allow these products to become convenience items sold on every corner without oversight. That broader issue must be addressed in future legislation, but it cannot be meaningfully tackled until the state knows who is selling these products in the first place. Licensure is the necessary starting point. SB 249 represents a critical first step toward correcting this imbalance. Requiring proper licensure allows regulators to identify bad actors, recover lost tax revenue, and reduce the black market while keeping these products available to adults through regulated, responsible retailers. These products should not be treated as convenience items sold on every corner. They belong in licensed vape shops that understand the products, the laws, and the responsibilities that come with selling them. This is a solution for another day. I respectfully ask for a favorable report on SB 249 as an important step toward fair regulation, consumer protection, and a level playing field for compliant Maryland businesses. Thank you for your time and consideration. Respectfully, Candice Gott