



March 6, 2026

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

**RE: Senate Bill 798 Public Health - Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Tobacco Cessation**

Dear Chair Beidle:

The Maryland State Council on Cancer Control (Council) respectfully submits this letter of support for Senate Bill 798 (SB 798), which would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, subject to budget limitations and federal law, to provide individual and group tobacco cessation counseling and would prohibit prior authorization requirements for tobacco cessation products and services.

SB 798 represents a critical and evidence-based step toward reducing tobacco use, preventing cancer, and improving health outcomes for Maryland residents who rely on Medicaid coverage.

**Strengthening Access to Evidence-Based Tobacco Cessation Services**

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of cancer incidence and cancer-related mortality. Comprehensive tobacco cessation services—including behavioral counseling and pharmacotherapy—are well established as the most effective approach to helping individuals quit successfully. SB 798 strengthens Maryland’s tobacco control framework by ensuring Medicaid enrollees have access to both individual and group counseling, services that are proven to improve quit rates and long-term abstinence.

**Removing Barriers That Undermine Quit Attempts**

Prior authorization requirements create unnecessary delays and administrative barriers that can disrupt quit attempts at the moment individuals are most motivated to stop using tobacco. SB 798 appropriately removes these barriers by prohibiting prior authorization for tobacco cessation products and services, allowing clinicians and cessation providers to respond immediately to patient readiness.

**Supporting Face-to-Face Counseling and Community-Based Support**

Research consistently demonstrates that face-to-face tobacco cessation counseling, including one-on-one coaching and group-based interventions, improves quit success - particularly when combined with pharmacotherapy. In-person and group-based services provide accountability, peer support, skill-building, and culturally responsive engagement.



### **Advancing Health Equity and Cancer Prevention**

Medicaid enrollees experience higher rates of tobacco use and tobacco-related disease. By expanding cessation counseling benefits and removing utilization barriers, SB 798 directly addresses disparities in access to preventive services.

### **Aligning With Maryland's Comprehensive Cancer Control Goals**

The Council supports policies that advance prevention, early intervention, and risk reduction across the cancer continuum. SB 798 aligns with Maryland's comprehensive cancer control priorities by strengthening tobacco cessation infrastructure.

For these reasons, the Maryland State Council on Cancer Control strongly supports SB 798 and respectfully urges the Senate Finance Committee to give the bill favorable consideration.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to public health and cancer prevention in Maryland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Taofeek Owonikoko".

Taofeek Owonikoko, MD  
Chair  
Maryland State Council on Cancer Control