

Chair Beidle and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senator Hayes's Senate Bill 279. I am grateful for his leadership and respectfully urge a favorable report.

In the past several years, Baltimore has experienced an explosion of smoke shops and other tobacco-focused retailers opening in commercial storefronts, often tightly clustered on single blocks. This past fall, I introduced a city bill that would require dispersal of these businesses and prevent them from opening near sensitive uses like schools and parks. SB279 will affirm Baltimore City's authority to enforce the local laws regulating these establishments. It will ensure the city's land use authority on this matter stands up to scrutiny if challenged.

Revitalizing city neighborhoods filled with vacant homes requires more than just restoring the residential character. We need to cultivate a healthy mix of businesses that support daily needs, encourage the foot traffic that will attract long-term investment to the commercial corridors and corner storefronts that serve those neighborhoods. Clusters of smoke shops undermine that goal and make it more difficult to bring in good actors who are looking to strengthen their communities.

More importantly, this will help Baltimore protect its youth. Tobacco retailers use advertising that entices young people to use addictive products that threatens their long-term health. The CDC and US Surgeon General have established that tobacco-retailer density and proximity are associated with increased tobacco-product consumption and higher youth initiation. Giving Baltimore the regulatory footing to limit the proliferation of smoke shops will pay dividends, both in terms of resident health and business strength.

To be clear, SB 279 and CB 25-0114 are not about banning retailers but about crafting laws that protect vulnerable main streets, commercial corridors, and children from predatory businesses. SB 279 will give Baltimore added legal confidence as it modernizes its zoning tools to protect youth, reduce inequitable exposure, and support more investable commercial corridors.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a **favorable** report on SB 279.

Councilmember Zac Blanchard

District 11, Baltimore City Council