



February 5, 2026

Senate Finance Committee
Testimony in Opposition to SB 279

Dear Members of the Committee,

The Cigar Association of America (CAA) submits the following testimony in opposition of Senate Bill 279, a bill that would enable the City of Baltimore to supersede the State’s regulatory authority over tobacco products. CAA is the leading national trade organization representing the interests of manufacturers, importers, distributors, and major suppliers in the cigar and pipe tobacco industry. The CAA is a key stakeholder in this discussion, as the proposed change in law has the potential to significantly impact its members and their ability to conduct business in Maryland.

Statewide regulation ensures that prevention measures are clear, achievable and well implemented. These programs are designed and funded by the State, not localities. The preemption model has been successful in seeing tobacco use in Maryland reach the lowest level in decades and trends indicate continued decline.¹ Establishing a new precedent whereby localities regulate will do little to change public health metrics. History has shown that where States have allowed this, consumers simply take their business to neighboring jurisdictions.

SB 279 would legislatively overturn the 2013 decision by the Maryland Court of Appeals in *Altadis v. Prince Georges County*, which ruled in favor of the State’s preemption authority over local ordinances. In that case, Maryland’s highest court reviewed the numerous state regulations governing tobacco sales and agreed that allowing local jurisdictions to enact similar ordinances would “invite chaos and confusion.”

Discrepancies between State and local law should not be the source of conflict between law enforcement and business owners. Nor should the State enable a locality to issue greater restrictions, pushing vulnerable communities into illicit markets. When regulation is fragmented, it burdens law enforcement resources and inevitably forces more encounters in the community.

SB 279 will harm local businesses in Baltimore that will lose the additional fuel and sundry purchases consumers make along with tobacco purchases. Fragmented regulation also discourages businesses from broader investment in the State – limiting economic growth and jobs. Without regulatory control over its largest city, the State will have little certainty over its future revenue projections.

CAA strongly opposes SB 279 because it will destabilize the current regulatory model, complicate

¹ Based on data from the CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the Maryland Department of Health, the adult smoking rate has dropped from approximately 19.1% in 2004 to 7.8% in 2024.

compliance, burden enforcement agencies and hurt local economies – setting the stage for future program deficits. Statewide preemption supports public health goals, facilitates compliance and balances the holistic needs of the State. Maryland cannot afford to abrogate its responsibilities in this area.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Pearce

President

Cigar Association of America