

Re: Letter of Support for House Bill 1576

Michelle Urzynecok, MGySgt, USMC, parent to Nick, childhood cancer patient

Honorable Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 1576, which increases the sales and use tax on electronic smoking devices and vaping liquid and directs the resulting revenue to the Maryland Pediatric Cancer Fund. Products that fuel nicotine addiction, particularly among children and teenagers, pose serious and well-documented health risks. Dedicating the additional revenue from these taxes to pediatric cancer research is a responsible and forward-looking step that both protects public health and invests in the lives of Maryland's children.

My support for this bill is personal. My son, Nick, was diagnosed with metastatic osteosarcoma when he was just 11 years old in 2018. Despite recent advances in some areas of pediatric oncology, frontline chemotherapy used to treat osteosarcoma today is the same regimen that was used 50 years ago. These chemotherapies are incredibly toxic. While they are currently still the best option available, they can lead to lifelong chronic conditions and secondary cancers. Children endure treatments at a time when their bodies are still developing, and the long-term consequences follow them for decades, if they are lucky enough to survive at all.

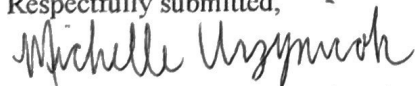
Maryland is a leader in both research and the care of children with cancer. My son is treated at Johns Hopkins Children's Center in Baltimore, and we owe the doctors and scientists there his life. Over the years, Nick has relapsed multiple times. He has undergone more than 40 surgeries, received front-line, second-line, and third-line treatments, and participated in multiple clinical trials as well as compassionate use therapies. Today, he is out of options, and the time we have with him is the most precious gift of all.

Families like mine understand, in the most personal way possible, why research cannot wait. My son does not have the luxury of waiting decades for the next clinical trial, he needs more effective and less toxic treatments now.

Consistent funding for critical childhood cancer research is key to saving children's lives. This bill will help provide the reliable and sustained source of funding that Maryland researchers need to move promising discoveries from the lab to the clinic. Investments like this can accelerate progress, open new clinical trials, and bring better treatment options to children who desperately need them.

I respectfully urge the Committee to give a favorable vote to House Bill 1576. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue and for considering the voices of families like mine whose lives are directly affected by pediatric cancer.

Respectfully submitted,



MGySgt Michelle Urzynecok, USMC