

Written Testimony in Support of House Bill (HB) 1576

Dana Kelly Christo, Childhood Cancer Survivor

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

My name is Dana Kelly Christo. I am a Maryland resident and a survivor of childhood acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). I am writing to urge a Favorable Report on HB 1576, which increases the tax on electronic smoking devices and vaping liquid and dedicates the additional revenue to the Maryland Pediatric Cancer Fund.

In 1976, at the age of four, I was fortunate to be enrolled in what became a landmark clinical trial at Johns Hopkins. At that time, survival rates for childhood ALL were 50% at best. The protocol to which I was randomized ultimately helped shape the standard of care for treating childhood ALL. *I am alive today because research dollars made that clinical trial possible.*

Three and a half years of chemotherapy side effects, painful procedures, and intermittent hospitalizations robbed me of much of my childhood. Like many survivors, I have carried the psychological impact of confronting death at a young age and the guilt of surviving when friends from the hospital did not. Others face chronic health conditions or secondary malignancies caused by the very treatments that saved their lives.

Maryland has world class clinicians and research institutions committed to improving the lives of children with cancer. Consistent and dedicated funding is essential to better understand and effectively treat childhood cancers while minimizing short- and long-term toxicities.

Pediatric cancer is especially urgent because it steals so many decades of life. Federal data show that cancer deaths in children ages 0–14 average about 70 years of life lost, compared with approximately 15 years for cancer overall. Yet cancer research funding is skewed toward adult cancers. Each breakthrough in pediatric cancer prevention and treatment can return an extraordinary number of life-years to Maryland children and families.

Maryland has already taken important steps, including establishing the Maryland Pediatric Cancer Fund. HB 1576 builds on that progress by creating a stronger, dedicated funding stream for pediatric cancer research and simultaneously discourages the use of addictive nicotine products in Maryland's youth.

I am living proof that pediatric cancer research is not abstract. I am surviving and thriving. I dedicated my graduate work and early career to identifying risk factors for cancers in women. I am graced with a loving and supportive family and two beautiful children, and I am grateful every day for the people and resources that made my survival possible. HB 1576 will help more Maryland children survive and live well after cancer. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a Favorable Report on House Bill 1576. Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Dana Kelly Christo, PhD MPH

