



March 25, 2026

Testimony of Laura Hale  
American Heart Association  
**Baltimore City Zoning Hearing on Tobacco Control**

The American Heart Association thanks the council for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of the ordinance limiting Smoke shops. The American Heart Association is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. Heart disease is the No. 1 killer worldwide, and stroke ranks second globally. Even when those conditions don't result in death, they cause disability and diminish quality of life. We want to see a world free of cardiovascular diseases and stroke. Our mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives.

In data from the [2024 National Tobacco Youth Survey](#), tobacco use among high school and middle school students continue to show concerning levels with more than 2.25 million youth using a tobacco product. Nearly 90% of the youth survey respondents reported using flavored e-cigarettes including mint and menthol. Flavored tobacco products remain the primary gateway for youth addiction, including an influx of new products entering the market such as nicotine pouches which come in youth appealing flavors and are marketed via social media influencers. In [Maryland](#), 14% of high school students use an electronic smoking device and 15.9% use a tobacco product. The tobacco industry has continued to target youth users with an onslaught of new flavored products making them appealing to youth, with many youth not realizing that these products contain nicotine. As a result, we are setting our kids up for a lifetime of addiction and losing the opportunity for the first tobacco-free generation.

Every day, more than 1,200 children under 18 years of age try their first cigarette, and more than 60 will become new, regular daily smokers and half of them will ultimately die from their habit.<sup>1,2</sup> People who start smoking at an early age are more likely to develop a severe addiction to nicotine than those who start at a later age.<sup>3</sup>

Community members have voiced their concerns about the proliferation of shops selling tobacco products throughout Baltimore City. **From a report compiled by the Alcohol Tobacco and Cannabis Commission and the Maryland Department of Health, Baltimore City has more licensed tobacco retailers than anyone else in the state.** Sitting at 1287 licensed cigarette retails, the density is deeply concerning. We also see high numbers near schools (38) which we do not see in other jurisdictions<sup>1</sup>. The density is extremely high in Baltimore City and we do not see it at this level anywhere else in the state, with Prince George's following a distant second.

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<sup>1</sup> [SB1056Ch462\(2\)\(2024\).pdf](#)

Unfortunately, preemption has severely limited municipalities in Maryland from implementing numerous evidence-based public policy strategies to reduce tobacco and e-cigarette use in our communities.

The American Heart Association is supportive of community led efforts like the one in Baltimore City that establishes stricter zoning regulations that are tailored to the needs of the community, limit youth exposure to these harmful deadly products, and begin to build a movement that empowers local communities to address tobacco throughout the commonwealth.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the health and wellbeing of the residents of Baltimore.