
CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor
Zeke Cohen – Council President



Office of Council Services

Nancy Mead - Director
100 Holliday Street, Room 415
Baltimore, MD 21202

COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

The Honorable Isaac "Yitzy" Schleifer
CHAIR

HEARING NOTES

25-0037R

Informational Hearing - Tobacco Retailers

Hearing Date: 3/19/2026

Hearing Start Time: 4:30 PM

Hearing End Time: 7:00 PM

Location: Du Burns Council Chamber / Webex

Total Estimated Attendance: 30

Committee Members in Attendance:

- **Chair** Isaac "Yitzy" Schleifer
- Ryan Dorsey
- Paris Gray
- **Vice Chair** Antonio Glover
- Sharon Green Middleton

Additional Councilmembers in Attendance

- Zeke Cohen
 - Jermaine Jones
 - Mark Parker
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MAJOR SPEAKERS

(This is NOT an attendance record.)

- Jennifer Martin – Deputy Commissioner, Baltimore City Health Department
 - Colonel Ryan Lee – Baltimore Police Department
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NOTES

- Chair Schleifer welcomed everyone to the committee
- Council President Cohen offered some opening remarks
 - Baltimore has 46 grocery stores and 1200 smoke shops
 - 15 smoke shops per square mile
 - Those stores are disproportionately found in the black butterfly
 - Smoke shops are selling unauthorized, illegal, and dangerous products
 - This city council will fight back
 - Staff was easily able to purchase illegal products
 - Authority and resources to police smoke shops is severely limited
 - The Health Department is focused on under age sales but they are under-resourced

- In FY24 they only investigated 149
- CM Glover
 - We were all elected to serve the people and make tough decisions
 - This is not a tough decision
 - We are not anti-business, not anti-tobacco stores
 - This is about making sure young people are not being served illegal substances
 - Kids are getting out of school and immediately going to smoke shops
 - It is illegal to sell any of the products offered at these stores to children
 - We faced similar issues like this in the 60s with liquor stores
 - We saw a big drop in crime when we saw the number of liquor stores drop
- Panel 1
 - Laura Hale – American Heart Association, American Lung Association, and Campaign for tobacco free kids
 - Nicotine has long-lasting effects on kids
 - Tashawna Miller
 - Vape use is increasing among students
 - Parents don't know where students are getting vapes
 - Asking for stronger support and accountability
 - Ryan Kennedy
 - Tobacco industry spends billions on marketing and promotion
 - There is a clear link between vendor density and youth use
 - Youth exposed to point of sale marketing have 1.6x higher likelihood of trying smoking and 1.3x higher of becoming smokers
 - Blair Innis
 - Manufacturers submit a pre-market authorization to the FDA
 - That process is newer than most vapes
 - The FDA allowed products to stay on the market until they received a marketing denial order
 - Mckenzie Marley
 - Dispensary products are all tested for contaminants
 - Packaging cannot be attractive to children
 - Laboratory results are traceable from QR codes
 - Testing requirements are even more stringent for legal the vape products
 - Jeff Jeton
 - These businesses are harmful to good faith local businesses and harm local economies
 - David Harris
 - Smoke shop operators don't live in our communities
- Agency Testimony
 - Sheriff's Office
 - Can be more active and play a role in this space
 - Memorandum with the ATCC does result in the Sheriff working on these issues
 - ATCC is currently testing cannabis seized
 - Proliferation of smoke shops is a vehicle to sell unlicensed cannabis
 - Local governments are somewhat hamstrung by state caselaw
 - Proud of partnerships with liquor board and ATCC

- Health Department
 - Adults who smoke in the city is decreasing
 - Youth tobacco use is increasing
 - Particularly vaping
- BPD
 - There is not a definition for what a smoke shop is, that creates a challenge in the data
 - BPD identified about 40 more “problematic” smoke shops
 - Problematic behaviors occur around smoke shops
 - Organized crime – drug trafficking, etc.
 - Violence
 - Environmental factors
 - Increase to volume of calls
- Questions
 - Chair Schleifer
 - How many citations issued in the past year
 - About 200 in the past year
 - How many people are issuing citations
 - Currently only one
 - What are those citations for
 - Sale of tobacco to those under 21
 - Council President Cohen
 - What percentage of smoke shops are selling illegal or unauthorized products to minors
 - BPD – difficult to determine, lots of unlicensed shops
 - Though not all tobacco retailers, most smoke shops present a problem
 - How many times in the past year have BPD agents participated in seizure and do you believe assessment of a fine results in closure
 - Does not have a firm number
 - The enforcement mechanisms in place do not allow BPD to shut down an establishment
 - We do not seem to have our arms around this problem
 - CM Glover and CP are working on a bill that would allow officers to padlock establishments engaged in illegal activities
 - There are crimes around these establishments beyond public nuisance
 - Someone is making a lot of money off of this endeavor, this is big business
 - VP Middleton
 - Thanks Councilman Glover and Council President for advocacy on this problem
 - There are laws on the books, including drug paraphernalia cannot be in windows
 - Notices city vacants are old liquor store fronts
 - Health
 - Part of enforcement is retailer education
 - Confined to enforcing youth use
 - BPD

- Fines are not impactful on their own
- CM Glover
 - 50% noncompliance rate of inspection so far in FY 2026
 - How many part time employees doing enforcement
 - 1 for the entire city
 - Are you proposing to get additional staff in the upcoming budget cycle
 - Working to create two full-time enforcement positions by reclassification and grant funding
 - What resources do you have to bring some control to young people buying tobacco products
 - We are working to see whether people can be brought on contractually
 - This is only one tool, we are also educating retailers
 - How would a padlock work
 - Need a certain number of reports, currently that is confined to trafficking activities
- Chair Schleifer
 - Are you asking for more money to cover those positions or are you reclassifying positions
 - Reclassification and grant funding
- CM Dorsey
 - We don't necessarily need to enforce against every illegal item to make it impossible for a smoke shop to operate
 - We have no way of knowing what any of these products actually are
 - Do our consumer protection laws allow us to enforce against products that have the effect of deceiving the consumer
 - State law does not even require that consumers are deceived, just that it has the intention to deceive
- CM Gray
 - The layout of smoke shops compared to dispensaries is radically different
 - No dispensary has products out
 - We have lots of people applying for a lottery ticket to open a dispensary
 - They fight historic racist policies
 - Tobacco shops skirting rules put a bad name on people working to have an honest legal business
 - What data does BCIT maintain on tobacco retailer locations and is that integrated with Health?
 - What data sharing agreements exist between the state and Baltimore city to track youth tobacco use trends
 - There are not agreements to share with state agencies, data is posted publicly and agencies can pull it
 - Would it be prudent to have that collaboration between city and state?
- Chair Schleifer
 - Why will the ATCC work with the Health Department but not come before the Baltimore City Council
 - Partnership goes both ways, disappointing they will not come today

- CM Jones
 - What should residents do to report illegal sales
 - Community informs responses, contact police departments through appropriate districts
 - What does the police department need to do something about this problem
 - The only thing that has been effective is to determine which stores have late night hours
 - BPD – any information is vetted
 - Sometimes the volume is sufficient
 - Sometimes congregation outside of an establishment is enough
 - Is there a collaboration between law enforcement for how to tackle this issue
 - Within the last year, has there been much coordination
 - BPD – strong collaboration between BPD, sheriff’s office, and ATCC
- Chair Schleifer
 - The ATCC’s office is in Baltimore City, and that’s where the biggest problem is but they won’t engage with the Baltimore City government
- Public Testimony
 - We should consider limiting licenses
 - These shops are replacing hanging out on street corners
 - Kids resell vapes from black markets – you have no idea what is in them
 - Students are able to obtain these products on their way to school
 - The code of conduct is not strongly enforced
- CM Glover
 - Thank everyone in attendance today
 - The system is falling short

Hearing Packet in bill file? -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Attendance Sheet in bill file? -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Vote Record in bill file? -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Agency reports read? -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Hearing televised or audio-digitally recorded? -----	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Certification of advertising/posting notices in the bill file? -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A
Evidence of notification to property owners in bill file? -----	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A

Notes by: Ethan Navarre
 Notes Date: 3/19/2026

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