

BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL



COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

35-0037R

*Informational Hearing
Tobacco Retailers*

Public Testimony

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**

**Attendance Sheet
3/19/2026**

25-0037R

25-0037R - Informational Hearing - Tobacco Retailers

SIGN IN TO TESTIFY			Position:		Check if Baltimore City lobbyist*
FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	ORGANIZATION AND/OR CONTACT INFORMATION	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	
✓ Felita Anane	Anane	Renaissance Behavioral Health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Anyon	Roye		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Angin	Lucas		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ John	Stewart		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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* IF YOU ARE COMPENSATED OR INCUR EXPENSES IN CONNECTION WITH THIS BILL, YOU MAY BE REQUIRED BY LAW TO REGISTER WITH THE CITY ETHICS BOARD AS A LOBBYIST. REGISTRATION CAN BE DONE ONLINE AND IS A SIMPLE PROCESS. FOR INFORMATION VISIT: [HTTPS://ETHICS.BALTIMORECITY.GOV/](https://ethics.baltimorecity.gov/) OR CALL: (410) 396-7986

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FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	ORGANIZATION AND/OR CONTACT INFORMATION	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	
✓ Rita	Crews	Belair Edson	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Community Association	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
✓ Audrey	Carter	Youth Ventures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	ORGANIZATION AND/OR CONTACT INFORMATION	SUPPORT	OPPOSE	
✓ Christopher	Cesh Sr.	City Schools ³²¹⁻³⁹⁹⁻¹⁸⁶²	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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March 19, 2026

Isaac “Yitzy” Schleifer
City Councilman
Chair, Legislative Investigations Committee
Baltimore City Council

RE: City Council Resolution 25-0037R: Informational Hearing – Tobacco Retailers

Chair Schleifer, Vice Chair Glover, & Members of the Committee:

My name is Ryan David Kennedy. I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Health, Behavior, & Society at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and I am a member of the faculty with the Institute for Global Tobacco Control. The views expressed here are my own and do not necessarily reflect the policies or positions of Johns Hopkins University.

What we are seeing in Baltimore is not accidental exposure—it is a retail system engineered to recruit and retain the next generation of people who use nicotine.

Accessibility, Normalization, & Retailer Density

A recent report from the Truth Initiative, released publicly in 2025, provides one of the clearest summaries of how the tobacco industry uses the retail environment to drive use. They document that the industry spends nearly \$9.5 billion annually on marketing. Over 95% of that marketing occurs in the retail environment.¹

This is not traditional advertising—it is primarily:

- Price discounts and coupons;
- Payments to retailers for product placement and shelving; and
- In-store displays and promotional materials.

These strategies are designed to increase exposure, reduce cost barriers, and ultimately increase initiation.¹

There are approximately 380,000 tobacco retailers in the United States, creating widespread exposure.¹ As highlighted in the Truth Initiative report and supported by the U.S. Surgeon General’s 2012 report, greater retailer density leads to increased exposure and higher likelihood of youth initiation.^{1,2}

This pattern is also seen in research by Dr. Michael Chaiton, University of Toronto, Dr. Joanna Cohen, Director of the Institute for Global Tobacco Control at Hopkins, and colleagues.^{3,4}

The Truth Initiative report, drawing on work by Dr. Lisa Henriksen and colleagues, shows that youth exposed to point-of-sale tobacco marketing have approximately 1.6 times higher odds of trying smoking and about 1.3 times higher odds of being susceptible to future smoking.^{1,5}

In Baltimore, this exposure is part of daily life, with products placed in highly visible locations and often at child eye level.¹ These environments include bright colors, flavors, and youth-oriented marketing features that increase appeal.¹

Lower Barrier to Initiation

Commercial cigarettes often created an immediate negative experience which acted as a deterrent. Today's products, particularly e-cigarettes, are engineered differently.

Many e-cigarettes use acids such as benzoic acid to reduce harshness, making the aerosol easier to inhale deeply and lowering the barrier to initiation.⁶ The National Academies of Sciences (2018) concluded that these features increase the likelihood of initiation and sustained use.⁶ Tobacco regulatory science research shows products are engineered to optimize the experience of people who use nicotine products and reinforce use.⁷ Retail strategies such as discounts and promotions further reduce barriers.¹

Retailers & Pharmacies

Retailers are the primary point of access for youth. Pharmacies are trusted health institutions, yet many continue to sell tobacco products.

CVS voluntarily ended tobacco sales in 2014, stating that tobacco sales are inconsistent with their mission.⁸ This decision was associated with reductions in cigarette purchasing.¹

Prevention & Enforcement

Retailers are a key leverage point for prevention. Effective strategies include enforcement, reducing density, and limiting promotion. The product landscape is evolving, including nicotine analogs.

Local policy can help address these gaps.

The retail environment is a system designed to increase exposure and sustain addiction. If we are serious about protecting youth in Baltimore, we must address that system directly.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ryan David Kennedy

References

1. Truth Initiative. The Truth About the Tobacco Industry and the Retail Environment. Washington, DC: Truth Initiative; 2024.
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Preventing Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: USDHHS, CDC; 2012.
3. Chaiton MO, Mecredy G, Cohen JE. Tobacco retail availability and risk of relapse among smokers. *Tob Control*. 2018;27(2):163–169.
4. Brown KS, Carpenter MJ, Chaiton MO, Cohen JE, et al. Exposure to tobacco retail outlets and smoking susceptibility among youth. *Health Place*. 2014;29:122–128.
5. Henriksen L, Feighery EC, Schleicher NC, et al. Receptivity to point-of-sale tobacco marketing and susceptibility to smoking. *Nicotine Tob Res*. 2010;12(7):669–676.
6. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Public Health Consequences of E-Cigarettes. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; 2018.
7. DeVito EE, Krishnan-Sarin S. E-cigarettes: impact of e-liquid components and device characteristics on nicotine exposure. *Curr Neuropharmacol*. 2018;16(4):438–459.
8. CVS Health. CVS Health completes acquisition of Target’s pharmacy and clinic businesses and announces end of tobacco sales. Press release; September 3, 2014.

Good afternoon, President Cohen and members of the City Council.

My name is William Woodruff and I'm a resident of Mayfield here in Baltimore City. I operate North Potomac Properties, which actively invests in and rehabs homes in Baltimore City--specifically in East Baltimore--for both homeownership and leasing. We work hard to build up these communities. We prioritize neighborhood curb appeal, and we even cover lawn care for our tenants so that they can have the best-looking yards on the block. Neighborhoods like Berea, Collington Square, and my former neighborhood, Belair-Edison, deserve a great quality of life. They are experiencing spikes of development and investment, but just as we are seeing this hard-won progress, smoke shops are looking to move in and capitalize.

The way some of these operators treat our communities is flat-out disrespectful. You can walk past tobacco retailers on Belair Road and Hillen Road that do not even bother to spell the words tobacco, cigarettes, or coffee accurately on their signage. Worse, there is a clear, predatory disparity in how business owners choose their locations. One such operator has admitted to placing a tobacco-selling business in Park Heights, yet choosing to open a coffee shop in Greektown (<https://www.bizjournals.com/baltimore/news/2025/11/12/agora-delicacy-greektown-cafe-coffee-shop.html>)

So while I am here today in strong support of the smoke shop zoning and regulation bills, I must suggest to the Council that this legislation does not go far enough. Right now, there are rumors that 2200 Prentiss Place is going to be turned into a smoke shop. Decades ago, the neighborhood came together and approved the use of that residential building for a specific, non-food business—a hair salon. When the community approved that hair salon, I don't imagine the neighbors foresaw a tobacco or cannabis-selling shop having a pathway to legally running a business in the same space.

Additionally, the drafted bill currently protects schools, recreation centers, and parks with a 500-foot buffer. However, it is silent on early childhood education and daycare centers. A Maryland EXCELS-certified daycare is less than 100 feet away from 2200 Prentiss Place. If we protect a park where a child might play for an hour, we should also protect our youngest, most impressionable citizens who could spend eight hours a day nearby learning and growing.

To truly protect our neighborhoods, this legislation must be amended. It should completely ban smoke shops from opening in locations where the original use was residential, and where the property only became commercial because the neighborhood granted approval for a specific non-food business. I should also consider a radius for childcare centers.

Thank you for bringing this hearing forward and for your time. I urge you to strengthen this bill and protect the progress being made in our communities.

Hillens

Tobacco Deli & Grocery



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HOT - COLD SANDWICHES

LUNCH - SALADS - JUICE

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TOBACCO
OPEN ALL DAY LONG!
CANDY AND TOBACCO
WE ACCEPT EBT
ICE CREAM DRINKS

ATM

SPEED
LIMIT
AHEAD

BELAIR RD



GROCERY & TOBACCO

CONVENIENCE

CIGAR SIGARETTE

SNACKS CANDY

2882



March 17, 2026

Council President Zeke Cohen

Baltimore City Council

100 N. Holliday Street

Baltimore, MD 21202

Councilmember Antonio “Tony” Glover

Councilmember Mark Parker

Councilmember Mark Conway

Councilmember Paris Gray

Councilmember John Bullock

Councilmember Zac Blanchard

Councilmember Jermaine Jones

Baltimore City Council

100 N. Holliday Street

Baltimore, MD 21202

Re: Support for Resolution 25-0037R – Informational Hearing on Tobacco Retailers

Dear Council President Cohen and Members of the Baltimore City Council:

On behalf of the Brewers Hill community, I am writing to express our strong support for Resolution **25-0037R**, calling for an informational hearing on tobacco retailers in Baltimore City.

As a neighborhood, we have experienced firsthand the rapid proliferation and clustering of tobacco and smoke shops in close proximity to one another. Within and around Brewers Hill, these establishments are often located just blocks apart, creating an oversaturation that raises serious concerns for residents.



Over the past two years, several of these businesses have been subject to law enforcement raids and have been associated with ongoing criminal activity. Despite these interventions, many continue to operate with little to no meaningful recourse. In some cases, these locations function effectively as unlicensed dispensaries, exploiting gaps in current policy and enforcement frameworks.

This situation highlights a broader systemic issue: there is a clear disconnect between existing regulations and the ability to effectively enforce them. These gaps allow problematic operators to persist, undermining both public safety and community trust. The resulting impacts are not abstract; they are felt daily by residents through increased disorder, safety concerns, and a diminished quality of life.

The Brewers Hill community has previously raised these concerns with our state delegation in Annapolis, advocating for stronger oversight and the implementation of more meaningful penalties for bad actors. However, meaningful progress requires alignment at both the state and local levels, as well as a clear understanding of how current laws are being applied on the ground.

We believe this hearing is a critical and necessary step toward:

- Understanding the true scope and density of tobacco retailers across neighborhoods
- Evaluating how existing laws are enforced and where breakdowns occur
- Identifying actionable solutions to strengthen oversight and accountability
- Protecting communities from the public safety and health impacts associated with these establishments

We respectfully urge the Council to use this hearing to drive meaningful change and to prioritize policies that close enforcement gaps, reduce overconcentration, and hold non-compliant operators accountable.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for your continued commitment to Baltimore's neighborhoods.

Sincerely,

Brant Fisher

President

Brewers Hill Neighbors, Inc.