



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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February 24, 2021

Delegate Dereck E. Davis, Chair
Economic Matters Committee
House Office Building, Room 231
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21041

Re: Testimony **IN SUPPORT** of HB 1011: Cigarettes, Other Tobacco Products, and Electronic Smoking Devices – Local Law Authorization

Dear Chair Davis and Members of the Committee,

I commend Delegate Rosenberg for sponsoring House Bill 1011, which would give Maryland's counties the authority to enact and enforce local laws regulating the sale and distribution of cigarettes, tobacco products, and electronic smoking devices. This legislation will rectify a 2013 Court of Appeals decision that called into question local governments' ability to respond to tobacco use in their jurisdictions and improve measures of public health.

During my first year on the Howard County Council in 2006, we passed a measure that would ban smoking in restaurants and bars throughout Howard County. As County Executive, I have made improving public health a priority of my administration. In my first year, I proposed local legislation that would raise the minimum legal age to purchase tobacco products and electronic smoking devices (also known as "e-cigarettes" or "vaping" devices) from 18 to 21 in Howard County, mirroring changes in state law. By increasing the purchasing age, my Administration kept our kids healthy and decreased their chance of lifelong addiction by reducing accessibility to these products.

In 2018, more than 3.6 million U.S. youth, including 1 in 5 high school students and 1 in 20 middle school students, reported current e-cigarette use. Senate Bill 410 will provide counties with more flexibility to tackle these somber statistics.

My Administration has also aggressively utilized the County's legal options to demand accountability from e-cigarette companies that have marketed their products to our children. Last year, Howard County joined several jurisdictions around the state to sue a particular e-cigarette company for using the same tactics that Big Tobacco companies used for decades to sell their products to minors and create a new market at the expense of their health. Increasing the number of tools that counties can use to regulate cigarettes, tobacco, and electronic smoking devices provides more opportunities for them to coordinate efforts. This can prevent companies from taking advantage of regulatory differences across county lines.



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As a former educator, I know that providing our young people with knowledge about the harms of tobacco and electronic smoking devices is key to preventing them from starting or becoming addicted. The Howard County Health Department operates the Howard County Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Program. This important public health measure provides free, evidence-based smoking cessation education and assistance, modeled after the American Lung Association's Freedom From Smoking Curriculum, to anyone who lives, works, or goes to school in Howard County. The Health Department also conducts a free Tobacco Awareness Program for Teens to teach middle and high schoolers about the harms of vaping. Free community programs require funding to continue to reach the largest spread. We were proud to fund over \$10.8 million to our Health Department to support needs such as these in Fiscal Year 2021.

As Maryland's counties and health departments continue to fight the health effects of COVID-19 in our communities, we must bear in mind that smokers are at a higher risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19. To help mitigate the risk of smoking-related illnesses both during this pandemic and beyond, counties should be allowed more power to regulate tobacco and smoking products. Del. Rosenberg's bill is well timed and will help improve the health of all of Maryland's communities if passed.

For these and many more reasons, I urge your partnership and support on House Bill 1011.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive