



**TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF HOUSE BILL 108
BEFORE THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
By Anne Marie O’Keefe, PhD, JD, Advocacy Chair
Maryland Public Health Association
February 17, 2016**

Let me begin by thanking Delegates Eric Luedtke and Barbara Frush for introducing HB 71, and the Members of the House Ways and Means Committee for hosting this important hearing today. I am Anne Marie O’Keefe. I serve the Maryland Public Health Association as its Advocacy Committee Chair. It is also my privilege to teach public health in the graduate school at Morgan State University.

MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a 143-year-old professional organization with more than 50,000 members dedicated to improving the population’s health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation. Public health is what we as a community do together with our government to assure the conditions for people to be healthy. There are few actions this Committee could take that would advance APHA’s and MdPHA’s mission more directly than the one you consider today.

Every year tobacco kills more people in this country than all of those who die from all the illegal drugs, alcohol, car crashes, fires, homicides and suicides *combined*. Each year in the state of Maryland alone, tobacco kills more than 7,500 smokers and hundreds more *nonsmokers* who die from secondhand smoke. It costs our state \$2.7 billion annually to treat the sick and dying victims of tobacco, many of whom are poor and underserved. Tobacco is not only the most deadly and addictive drug that we know, it actually kills more of us than most of the other products that we tax and regulate *put together*.

I am extremely proud to say that our great state of Maryland has been a leader in protecting its citizens from the scourge of tobacco. We have cleaned up indoor air to protect those who want to choose not to smoke. We have reduced the ubiquitous advertizing designed to entice our kids, at their most susceptible age, to start smoking. We have greatly reduced illegal sales of cigarettes to underage youth. We have also proven that the single most powerful and effective measure we can take to help smokers quit and to help kids not start smoking is to raise the price of cigarettes through taxation.

These policies not only cost little to implement and enforce, but they have greatly reduced mortality and morbidity, significantly increased worker productivity, and have added billions of dollars to the public coffers for other investments in health. Tax increases on tobacco produce very consistent results; every time the taxes on tobacco go up, more money flows into state coffers and fewer people smoke. Tax policy is one of the most powerful tools we have used to protect Marylanders from tobacco over the last few decades.

Nearly 75% of our total health care bill is spent to treat chronic disease, especially the heart disease and cancers caused by tobacco. Through this spending to treat sick and dying smokers, Maryland taxpayers are actually subsidizing the tobacco companies. It’s time to raise the taxes on tobacco to a level closer to the social costs this product imposes on all of us.