

## **Department of Behavioral Health Invites Public Comment on its Plan to Mitigate Illegal Tobacco Sales to Minors**

(Washington, DC) – The Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) is inviting public comment on its [FY 2026 Synar Report](#) which outlines the District’s progress and plans to reduce youth tobacco access through illegal sales. Public comments on the FFY 2025 Synar Report should be sent no later than February 28, 2026, to Thomas Randolph, Synar Coordinator, at [Thomas.Randolph@dc.gov](mailto:Thomas.Randolph@dc.gov)

DBH manages the District of Columbia’s compliance with the federal Synar Program that requires states and federal jurisdictions to enact laws and enforcement programs prohibiting the sale or distribution of tobacco products to minors. District law prohibits the sale of tobacco products to individuals under the age of 21.

In the District of Columbia, the number of teens who report smoking continues a decade plus decline while the first tobacco use remains about age 10. Based on results from the [2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey](#), which is the latest available report, the percentage of high school students who reported cigarette use within the past 30 days was 3.1 percent— just slightly down from 3.2 percent in 2021. Additionally, students reporting trying cigarettes for the first time before the age of 13 has also decreased, going from 5.4 percent in 2021 to 4.8 percent in 2023. The Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (YRBS) is conducted every two years by the Office of the State Superintendent for Education, with the most recent having been conducted in 2023.

“The use of tobacco products by minors, in any form, is unsafe.” said Barbara J. Bazron, Ph.D., Director of the Department of Behavioral Health. “Tobacco use can negatively impact their academic performance and their development into adulthood. “Preventing tobacco product use early is critical to good health later in life.”

DBH expanded its scope of the Synar Program to include vaping devices as well. District law includes vaping devices in the definition of tobacco products, making them illegal to be sold to or consumed by individuals under the age of 21. In the 2023 YRBS, the percentage of high school students who report using a vaping product was 9.6 percent. down from 10.1 percent in 2021.

DBH conducts unannounced random inspections of hundreds of retail outlets to monitor compliance with the law. Merchants who illegally sell tobacco products are subject to fines ranging from \$2,500.00 to \$10,000.00. In addition to its enforcement efforts, the DBH sponsors a tobacco merchant education program to educate retailers about the law and to promote compliance.

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