

I'm grateful to Montgomery County for allowing me to participate in this hearing by means of written testimony.

I live in downtown Silver Spring. I've never once so much as stepped inside a hookah lounge, but we have plenty of them here. Bill 3-24 proposes to restrict the hours of operation of these spaces (along with those of vape and tobacco shops). I believe this would be a mistake.

There's no law of the universe that says streets must be dangerous at night. Urban streets become dangerous when they're abandoned—when there are no passersby to monitor them. What makes nighttime streets unsafe is this lack of passersby.

That's why it's actually helpful to safety to have establishments that can attract nighttime patrons. The presence of these people coming and going increase the life of the streets and thereby make them safer. It's a sheltered and moralistic fantasy to imagine that we can improve our streets by restricting the hours of hookah lounges. By removing an innocent reason to be out late at night, we would only be abandoning our nighttime streets to non-innocent uses. That hardly makes the streets safer.

There's a temptation for those of us who were raised in white middle-class suburbia to look down on our neighbors and their nocturnal visits to hookah lounges or vape shops as something irregular and morally-crooked. But this isn't right. Cities thrive when citizens have diverse habits and lifestyles. The fact that I would never make an early-morning visit to a hookah lounge is no reason to suspect that my neighbor who does so is a dangerous character. He and those like him are doing us all a service by peopling our nighttime streets.

There are many things we could do to increase safety and improve urbanism in our county, but shutting down nighttime establishments is a step in the wrong direction. I urge everyone to oppose Bill 3-24.

Josiah Duran