(3) access to coverage for employers with fewer than 10 employees compared to employers with more than 10 employees;

(4) ease of comprehension and comparability of benefit plans for consumers;

(5) premium costs for employers and employees and out–of–pocket costs for employees;

(6) the number of lives and groups covered; and

(7) the number of carriers offering policies to small employers; and

(d) on or before ~~December 31, 2001~~ *January 1, 2002*, the Commission shall report the findings and recommendations of the study to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2–1246 of the State Government Article, to the General Assembly.

SECTION 2. ~~AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That the implementation of this Act shall be contingent on an increase to $10 million in the total allowable fees assessed in any fiscal year as provided under § 19–111 of the Health – General Article. If the limit on the total allowable fees is not increased, the Maryland Health Care Commission, no later than June 1, 2001, shall notify the Department of Legislative Services, 90 State Circle, Annapolis, Maryland 21401–1991.~~

~~SECTION 2.~~ ~~3.~~ AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect June 1, 2001. ~~At~~ It shall remain effective for a period of 7 months and, at the end of ~~December 1, 2001 December 31, 2001~~ *January 1, 2002*, with no further action required by the General Assembly, this Act shall be abrogated and of no further force and effect.

May 17, 2001

The Honorable Casper R. Taylor, Jr.
Speaker of the House
State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have today vetoed House Bill 698 – Tobacco Tax – Purchase of Tax Stamps.

House Bill 698 increases the discount rate of the purchase price of tobacco tax stamps offered by the State Comptroller to cigarette wholesalers from 0.82 percent to 1.1 percent. In addition, the bill repeals the Comptroller's authority to exempt wholesalers from bonding requirements, requiring all wholesalers to post bonds. Cigarette wholesalers purchase tobacco stamps in bulk from the Comptroller based on the inventory of cigarettes they expect to have in their warehouses. The stamps are then attached to the packs of cigarettes providing visual verification that the tax has been paid. To compensate for the expense of administering the tobacco tax through the purchase and affixing of tax stamps, wholesalers are given a discount on the price of the stamp.