



CITY OF BANGOR

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Testimony in Support of LD 1215 – “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products”

And

LD 1174 – “An Act to Prohibit the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products”

April 25, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Patricia Hamilton, Director of the City of Bangor’s Public Health and Community Services Department. I am providing testimony on behalf of the Bangor City Council in support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products,” and LD 1174, “An Act to Prohibit the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.”

On July 25, 2022, the City of Bangor amended City Code to ban the sale of flavored tobacco and nicotine products within city limits. There was much debate at the time, and the data supporting the ban was overwhelming. According to the Maine Centers for Disease Control

- 70% of teen e-cigarette users cite flavors as a reason they use the product;
- 50% of high school youth who smoke cigarettes use menthol products; and
- 80% of youth who use any type of tobacco product started with a flavored product.

The Flavors Hook Kids Maine Campaign reports there are over fifteen thousand flavored tobacco products on the market today.

Flavored tobacco products, including cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, and e-cigarettes, are undermining Maine’s efforts to reduce youth tobacco use, all while the Maine CDC is pumping millions of dollars through its Maine Prevention Network to support tobacco, e-cigarette and vaping prevention. It seems counterintuitive that the state would spend millions to prevent tobacco use while at the same time allowing the sale of products that promote it.

In 2009, Maine celebrated a 64% reduction in high school smoking rates. Unfortunately, that started to erode around 2013 when the popularity of vaping increased. According to the 2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 28% of Maine high school students said they’d used a vaping device in the last 30 days. Our Public Health Department staff speak often with parents, teachers, and administrators, all of whom cite vaping as one of the largest issues impacting schools today. Vaping transcends both income and social groups and has permeated every corner of school life. As mentioned earlier, 80% of youth who use any type of tobacco started with a flavored product. It’s no coincidence that the vast majority of vaping products, touted by the industry as “harmless water vapor”, are targeting our youth with yummy, carnival-like flavors.

Ongoing and robust efforts at the state, regional and local levels to reduce tobacco use are no match for the tobacco industry. We need you – the Legislature – to do our part by providing a strong policy framework to remove these dangerous products from store shelves. With the full support of the Bangor City Council, I urge you to pass LD 1215 and LD 1174 to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

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