

LD 1215: An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak with you all today. My name is Dr. Annie Coates, I am a pediatric pulmonologist, board member of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and I am passionate about educating our young and communities about the harmful effects of flavored tobacco products.

The focus of today's testimony is specifically on menthol flavored tobacco products. Menthol is a commonly used chemical primarily derived from peppermint or corn mint plants. It has multiple different medicinal properties, the vast majority of which are not why tobacco companies add it to their products. Instead, they are capitalizing on its local anesthetic properties which effectively numb or cool the respiratory tract, especially the nose, mouth and throat. Menthol also suppresses the cough reflex and possibly dilates the bronchi (or small airways within the chest) and enable deeper inhalation and tolerability of inhaled smoke.

Furthermore, studies have shown menthol cigarette smoking resulted in slower nicotine metabolism or breakdown and lower total nicotine clearance in the body. Ultimately, this leads to higher nicotine dependence and therefore greater difficulty in quitting.

Approximately 90% of all African American smokers use menthol cigarettes. Menthol also appears to alter cell membranes throughout the body resulting in greater potential for tobacco related deaths from heart disease, cancer and stroke which are the 3 leading causes of death for African Americans in the USA.

This is entirely preventable.

As a pediatric pulmonologist, as a mother, as a resident of Maine who has dedicated my career to the health of our communities, please your voice and support this critical legislation. The wellbeing of our youth, the African American community and other minority populations depend on it.