

Dear Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services,

I am writing as a substance use prevention specialist in support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products”. I work closely with youth in Maine and my concern is for those who started vaping flavored tobacco products back in seventh grade, during COVID and now are in high school and are not able to stop using. When a person becomes addicted to nicotine, their brain craves it every twenty to thirty minutes. Youth are struggling during the school day and are experiencing withdrawal symptoms such as agitation, anxiousness, and lack of concentration. Nicotine addiction can prime the brain and can be incredibly difficult to quit. If a person begins using other substances after becoming addicted to nicotine, they are more likely to develop addiction to those other substances. The brain is best for learning without much effort between the ages of thirteen and twenty. If a person learns healthy coping skills and activities during that time period, those are more likely to stick and continue. However, ninety percent of addiction begins before the age of eighteen. According to the [2019 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey](#), there was a near doubling in youth e-cigarette use since 2017 (28.7% vs. 15.3%).

There are more than 15,000 flavored tobacco products with candy and fruit flavors which appeal to youth. When youth started using these products they did not know that they contained nicotine and thought that it was just water vapor. We now know there are many harmful chemicals in the devices....and the most harmful is nicotine. The tobacco industry purposefully targets high-risk populations such as those who are LGBTQ and those who are from Black and Brown communities. In those communities, the tobacco industry uses manipulative strategies: increased availability, marketing, and lower prices.

LD 1215 is critical in preventing substance use addiction and by keeping these appealing products out of the hands of young people we will see less addiction and more healthy youth development. Many people ask me “What are you doing to prevent the opioid epidemic?” and my reply is “People don’t typically start with opioids....they start with nicotine, alcohol, and or cannabis”. Please support this important legislation. Thank you.

Lee Anne Dodge  
Dresden, ME

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LD 1215

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