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To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing today to add my support for the proposal to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in Maine. It is a crucial step in protecting the youth of our communities, especially during this time when the use of these products may be adding to the risk of spreading Covid and its subsequent respiratory issues.

Tobacco use remains one of the leading causes of preventable death in the United States. As a health care professional, I have seen the detrimental effects of tobacco use time and time again. From working on a cardiopulmonary floor at Duke Medical Center to the remote hospitals of Appalachia and Down East Maine, I have witnessed the addiction and after effects of years of nicotine usage. Addiction often so severe that patients risk using these products while on oxygen or when they are barely able to catch their breath just sitting at rest. I have seen fear in their eyes as they realize that they can no longer perform their normal activities of daily living or walk down the hall of their home. Sadly, too many times, I have observed those with lifelong nicotine addiction lose the capability to independently care for themselves. It is likely that these individuals could not have imagined that those first few cigarettes, smoked in their youth, would lead to years of disability, and too often, take away the later years of their lives.

In Maine, this problem has been growing far more rapidly than most realize. According to the National Youth Tobacco Survey in 2021, 20% of high school students still reported using e-cigarettes. Though there has been a slight decline in usage since the beginning of the pandemic, the rate had increased from 15.8% to 30.2% from 2017-2019. This uptick had been bolstered by the addition of over 15,000 flavored tobacco products on the market. Many children feel these flavored products are harmless, but they have been shown to be even more addictive. Four out of five children start their nicotine use with flavored products. Unfortunately, most of these users are already hooked before the age of 21.

We need to find a solution to break this cycle in order to preserve the health of our Maine youth. Please consider how much ending the sale of these products will contribute towards healthier Maine communities.