

Testimony in support of LD 1215
An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

From: Elsie Flemings
April 25, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Elsie Flemings, I am speaking as a parent and a resident of Bar Harbor, a community which recently passed a flavored tobacco ban. I am testifying in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

While Bar Harbor joined Portland, Brunswick, Bangor, and South Portland in passing a full flavored tobacco ban, it's critically important to extend the protection that we are giving our children in Bar Harbor to other communities statewide. I know this as a parent, looking ahead to the choices that my own young children will face as they navigate the world, subjected to the pressures by tobacco companies looking for future customers and exploiting the natural risk-taking phase of youth brain development.

I know this also with the added perspective afforded to me as the Executive Director of Healthy Acadia, a non-profit community health organization which primarily serves Washington and Hancock counties and partners with other organizations across the state. Given that tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death and disease nationwide, we must do everything we can to prevent future deaths from tobacco use. Banning flavors to reduce youth initiation is an important and meaningful next step.

Early youth use of nicotine and tobacco products have profoundly negative impacts on those youth and on our communities. Tobacco companies specifically target young people with flavored tobacco products, using targeted online marketing techniques that often don't register with parents and other adults because they don't see the same advertisements. Nicotine use is linked to increased anxiety and depression, a serious concern when we are already seeing high numbers of youth experiencing mental health struggles. And youth and young adults are also much more susceptible to nicotine addiction, which can in turn increase risk for addiction to other substances.

Keeping flavored tobacco out of the hands of our youth will help to protect them, and that is the primary focus here, but it will help to protect our communities as a whole, too. It's so easy to think of substance use, and tobacco use in particular, as a personal choice, and therefore, presumably one that doesn't impact the people around us. Because nicotine is less intoxicating, it can seem relatively harmless compared to substances that are more intoxicating. However, in the end, tobacco kills nearly half a million people per year, which is more than alcohol, AIDS, car

accidents, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined (tobaccofreekids.org). Its use also harms community members' efforts to be successful in recovery, and we know that nicotine, when consumed with other substances like opioids, results in a greater consumption of both substances.

The negative effects of nicotine addiction have far-reaching and powerfully negative impacts on our youth, their futures, and just as importantly, on their families. Any young person who grows up to be tobacco-free helps our whole state in so many ways. Our youth are our future; this is an issue that can bring all of us together.

Please protect our children and other vulnerable populations in our community by voting “yes” to support LD 1215, the ban on the sale of flavored tobacco products. Thank you!