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South Portland
LD 1215

Dear All,

I am writing to you today in favor of LD 1215 as a physician and most importantly as a mom of 2 sons ages 11 and 15, and like all parents, I want to make sure my kids have a chance to be healthy, happy, and productive in the short and long term. Many of us writing to you and providing live or Zoom testimony are parents, grandparents, and concerned community members. The reality is all of us have family, friends, and neighbors who we care about and want the best for.

The same can't be said for the tobacco industry which doesn't care about people – it cares about profits. Period. Their only concern is, and has always been, to lure and hook new users – with targeted advertising and marketing campaigns, clever devices (like USB-type drives), and with menthol, fruit, and candy flavors (over 15,000). Their business model solely depends on people starting and becoming addicted to nicotine.

LD 1215 is about the health of our youth – giving all of our kids and the next generation of kids a fair shot at growing up without addiction that takes such a heavy toll on our families and communities.

LD 1215 is also about justice and fairness, because the tobacco industry has been targeting African Americans, the LGBTQ+ community, and other marginalized groups for decades with flavored products – particularly menthol products. For anyone thinking about creating a loophole for menthol, I ask you to please think about Black Americans and the extreme disparities in menthol use, addiction, and tobacco-related illness they experience. Indeed, 85% of African American adults who smoke use menthol cigarettes, compared with 29% of white adults. Turning a blind eye to those disparities and allowing the injustice to continue is frankly, unconscionable, and unacceptable – it's certainly not what we're teaching our kids at home, in our schools, in our communities across this amazing State of Maine.

As a family medicine physician, I can also say that promoting healthy choices is a foundational pillar of personal health at all ages. By avoiding and actively preventing long-term substance use, the prevention of nicotine addiction is incredibly important. We know from research that early exposure and continued use of tobacco is linked to higher chances of any substance use/abuse.

In addition, our health care community as a whole, should be doing better to care for those in recovery. By never addressing their continued nicotine addiction on their recovery journey, we are leaving them with the potential higher risk for relapse due to the physiologic and neurologic wiring patterns that nicotine causes in the brain. Not to mention the continued financial burden and the risk of numerous preventable chronic health issues we have known for decades results directly from tobacco use including cardiovascular disease, lung disease, and cancer. They deserve better.

The conversations I have had during this campaign over the last 7 months with Maine residents, both kids and adults of all ages, business owners and their personal stories of their experiences in our public schools, their peer and friend groups, at their jobs, and within their families and neighborhoods has been powerful and moving... but also frustrating and enraging that the tobacco companies have so much access to and influence on our youth. But rather than being discouraged I feel hopeful that We DO have communities and leaders that care. They care about all of our youth, their health and our collective future as a thriving community and state.

The decision to support LD 1215 and end the sale of flavored tobacco product sales, including menthol, is an investment, and a statement to our youth and our marginalized populations that we do care about them. All of them, because we are them.

I am grateful for this opportunity to get involved with something I deeply believe in

and positively impacts all of us. I am hopeful that the Legislature will pass LD 1215 in favor of ending the sale of menthol and all flavored tobacco products and become a leader joining California and Massachusetts.

Thank you for your time and dedication.

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