



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony of Maine Conservation Voters
“An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco”
Before the Committee on Health and Human Services
April 25, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health & Human Services:

My name is Kathleen Meil and I serve as Senior Director of Policy & Partnerships at Maine Conservation Voters. Our organization represents more than 13,000 members and supporters dedicated to protecting Maine’s environment and our democracy. Today, that means testifying in support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco.”

Flavored tobacco, most commonly consumed through e-cigarettes, poses myriad public health and environmental hazards. Demand for these products among high school students increased 1,000% between 2019 and 2020, and with more than 15,000 flavors like bubblegum and cotton candy, they are clearly designed to hook kids. This predatory practice comes as no surprise; the tobacco industry wrote the playbook for all industries that rely on deceptive, damaging practices that harm human, environmental, and ecological health, and openly refers to our children as “replacement smokers.”¹

This Committee will hear copious testimony on the devastating health impacts of flavored tobacco and the long-term consequences of nicotine addiction. Maine Conservation Voters shares those concerns; we’re not striving to address the climate crisis and shore up our democratic systems just to have our kids’ futures derailed by the tobacco industry. On top of that, e-cigarettes are an environmental disaster.

Every discarded e-cigarette contains a lithium-ion battery that *could* be recycled. Lithium is a critical mineral used to power everything from mobile phones to electric cars, and we must use and reuse it strategically as we shift away from fossil fuels. It’s both shocking and shameful that

¹ <https://www.lung.org/research/sotc/by-the-numbers/10-bad-things-to-entice-kids>

“five disposable vapes are being thrown away every second... over a year, this amounts to 150 million devices... [and] enough lithium for about 6,000 Teslas.”²

The lithium in e-cigarettes could be reused, but the devices themselves are considered hazardous waste³ and aren't recyclable. Unlike other electronics, e-cigarette manufacturers do not provide consumers with clear instructions on how to properly handle e-cigarette waste once the device or its accessories reaches the “end of life.” They leave the onus of figuring out how to safely dispose of e-cigarettes to the consumer, which is how they end up in all sorts of places. Indeed, these devices introduce plastic, nicotine salts, heavy metals, lead, mercury, and flammable lithium-ion batteries into waterways, soil, and to wildlife. They eventually break down into microplastics and flow into storm drains, polluting our waterways and wildlife.

Flavored tobacco products hurt Maine people and places, and disposable e-cigarettes squander lithium we need to power the clean energy transition. By ending the sale of flavored tobacco, LD 1215 will lessen the damage to Maine's people, economy, environment, and way of life. Maine Conservation Voters supports LD 1215 and urges you to vote “ought to pass.”

Thank you.

Kathleen Meil
Senior Director of Policy and Partnerships
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²<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2022-12-15/lithium-being-trashed-by-the-tonne-as-disposable-vapes-flood-us-market>

³ <https://www.publichealthlawcenter.org/webinar/what-waste-legally-disposing-e-cigarettes-and-nicotine-products>