

April 23, 2023

Re: LD 1215: An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Anita Ruff, and I am a resident of Brunswick and a longtime public health professional. I urge you to vote to support LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

I wear multiple hats today: as parent of two teenagers, as the executive director of one of Maine's free clinics, and as a daughter who lost both parents to lung cancer. Tobacco use has affected my life and those around me – profoundly.

I came to Maine as a field assignee for the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Cancer Prevention and Control. My job was to help develop the state's cancer plan, its cancer partnership, and to programs that reduce the toll of cancer in our state. I have spent a significant portion of my career thinking about cancer. The human and economic cost of this disease is devastating.

How many of you, when you go to dentist to get your teeth cleaned, are asked what flavor of toothpaste you'd like? How many of you choose grape, bubblegum, strawberry, or cherry? Probably not many. Those flavors are available not for the adults – but for the kids.

The same is true with flavored tobacco. Cotton candy, Froot Loops, watermelon, and gummi bears – these are the tastes of childhood. You and I know this, and tobacco companies know this, too.

When you sell a product known to cause a deadly disease for your users, I guess you have to get creative. That's why there is such resistance. Selling flavored tobacco is critical in developing new smokers, and we know that 95% of smokers start before they are 21.

Both of my parents were smokers. They both died with lung cancer spread throughout their bodies. If they could, they would tell you that they wished they had never started smoking. And they would implore you and me to take every step we can to protect our children from that first puff.

Please vote yes to support LD 1215. Thank you.