

In favor of LD1214, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco
Madonna Soctomah
Pleasant Point/Sipayik

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Madonna Soctomah and I live at Pleasant Point/Sipayik, in Washington County. I am here today as a parent, grandparent, former lawmaker, and Washington County community member to testify in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

This is an issue that has the potential to impact the lives of our young people for a long time- for the rest of their lives, as a matter of fact. Nicotine exposure in youth has so many harmful effects- it creates addiction pathways, impairs brain development and sets youth up for mental health struggles.¹ These are potential life-long struggles.

The flavored tobacco products are the leading reason for their experimentation with it,² and youth who begin vaping are more likely to move onto to cigarettes than those who never tried the electronic devices.³

As a former menthol cigarette user, I can say that even if I were still smoking menthol cigarettes, I would be here in front of you, this afternoon, to tell you that we need to keep these products out of the hands of our youth. Once addicted, it's extremely difficult to quit- especially menthol products.^{4,5} There's a reason why tobacco companies market flavored tobacco products more heavily to the most vulnerable populations, which include youth- because they are more vulnerable to the addiction.⁶

By working together to end the sale of flavored tobacco products, we have the potential to create positive health changes around an issue that everyone cares about, no matter what political party they belong to- prioritizing the health and well-being of our youth. Don't listen to voices telling you that this is about "personal choice for adults"- adults have the choice to use a different product. Our youth and their developing brains are being exploited by tobacco companies who are only interested in grooming a new generation of addicted customers; this industry lies to all of us, including small, struggling, rural Maine business owners, with sophisticated marketing and advertisements about how, basically, harmless tobacco is.

Focusing on ending the sale of flavored tobacco will benefit everyone in our communities. Please vote in favor of LD 1214, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco. Thank you.

1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3543069/>

2 US Department of Health and Human Services. 2016. E-Cigarette use among youth and young adults: A report of the surgeon general. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health

3 Berry KM, Fetterman JL, Benjamin EJ, et al. 2019. Association of electronic cigarette use with subsequent initiation of tobacco cigarettes in US youth. *JAMA Netw Open*;2(2):e187794

4 Truth Initiative. 2018. What is menthol? <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/traditional-tobacco-products/menthol-facts-stats-and-regulations>.

5 CTFK. 2020. Tobacco use among African Americans. <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/assets/factsheets/0006.pdf>.

6 <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/tobacco-industry-marketing/young-adults-living-vulnerable-dc-communities-see#:~:text=The%20tobacco%20industry%20has%20a,resents%20and%20low%2Dsocioeconomic%20individuals>.

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