

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Helen Jolley, and I live in Bar Harbor. I am writing today to testify in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

As a Health & Physical Education teacher at Conners Emerson School in Bar Harbor, I have seen firsthand the effects of tobacco use on our youth. Our elementary and middle school students are constantly exposed to flavored tobacco use through peer, family and community use, which sets them up for addictions later on. It's hard for us working in the school systems to see the impacts of our students struggling with tobacco use in our community. Even with our best efforts to keep it out of their hands and off of school properties, we know that the data shows that 1 out of 3 Maine high school students have used e-cigarettes, and 1 out of 5 are currently using them; the problem of youth vaping is incredibly widespread.

Flavors are the hook for young people and tobacco companies know it. Teens try the newest device with the flavor that sounds the most attractive to them; and then because the flavors are designed to appeal to them, they become addicted to nicotine, and the tobacco companies gain a lifelong customer. Many youth and even adults think that vaping is a harmless alternative to cigarette smoking - that it's just flavored water. But one vape cartridge can have the same amount of nicotine as a pack of cigarettes. The nicotine exposure negatively impacts their brain development and sets them up for trouble down the road. Even if they don't realize it, in the short term their attention, learning, and memory does suffer.

The Town of Bar Harbor recently ended the sale of flavored tobacco products in Bar Harbor, and while it's too soon to see the data, I am already noticing a reduction in how frequently my students are exposed to flavored tobacco products. Other cities and states that have banned the sale of flavored tobacco products have found that the data shows a reduction in the number of teens who are vaping. The history of successful public health initiatives shows us that while educating and supporting the individual is important, public policy plays a critical role in the health of our citizens. The State of Maine has an opportunity to make the lives of our students a little easier and help protect them from the tobacco companies. Please vote to end the sale of flavored tobacco products in our state.