

# MaineHealth

## MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community  
Health Network  
LincolnHealth  
MaineHealth Care At Home  
Maine Behavioral Healthcare  
Memorial Hospital  
Maine Medical Center  
Mid Coast-Parkview Health  
NorDx  
Pen Bay Medical Center  
Southern Maine Health Care  
Waldo County General Hospital  
Western Maine Health

## Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable  
Care Organization

## MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health  
New England Rehabilitation  
Hospital of Portland  
St. Mary's Health System

## Testimony of Dr. Annie Coates, MaineHealth In Support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products” Tuesday, April 24, 2023

Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak with you all today. My name is Dr. Annie Coates, I am a pediatric pulmonologist at Maine Medical Center, board member of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and I am passionate about educating our young and communities about the harmful effects of flavored tobacco products.

The focus of today’s testimony is specifically on menthol flavored tobacco products. Menthol is a commonly used chemical primarily derived from peppermint or corn mint plants. It has multiple different medicinal properties, the vast majority of which are not why tobacco companies add it to their products. Instead, they are capitalizing on its local anesthetic properties which effectively numb or cool the respiratory tract, especially the nose, mouth and throat. Menthol also suppresses the cough reflex and possibly dilates the bronchi (or small airways within the chest) and enable deeper inhalation and tolerability of inhaled smoke.

Furthermore, studies have shown menthol cigarette smoking resulted in slower nicotine metabolism or breakdown and lower total nicotine clearance in the body. Ultimately, this leads to higher nicotine dependence and therefore greater difficulty in quitting.

Approximately 90% of all African American smokers use menthol cigarettes. Menthol also appears to alter cell membranes throughout the body resulting in greater potential for tobacco related deaths from heart disease, cancer and stroke which are the 3 leading causes of death for African Americans in the USA.

### **This is entirely preventable.**

Lastly, not long ago, I was consulted on a previously healthy adolescent who was admitted to the Barbara Bush Children’s Hospital Pediatric Intensive Care Unit in respiratory failure. Over the prior year, he started smoking flavored (including menthol) e-cigarettes (supplied by “friends”) daily. His impression at the time was that he was inhaling “just flavored water” and that they “wouldn’t get him addicted, like his parents were to cigarettes.” What he didn’t understand was the extend of the harmful effects of e-cigarettes and that they did likely have nicotine in them, which he had since become addicted to, and directly contributes to his critical

health condition. But the damage didn't just stop there for him. He had gone from being a "good student" to skipping school to smoke, which resulted in failing multiple classes. Furthermore, he developed a multitude of other daily symptoms (headaches, difficulty concentrating, and abdominal pain) all that can be attributed to nicotine addiction.

As a pediatric pulmonologist, as a mother, as a resident of Maine who has dedicated my career to the health of our communities, please your voice and support this critical legislation. The wellbeing of our youth, the African American community and other minority populations depend on it.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.