

Testimony of Shawn Yardley, Bowerbank, Maine
In favor of
LD 1215 An Act To End The Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Shawn Yardley and I am recently retired after 45 years working with children and on children's issues as a child welfare professional and social service provider, including as Director of Health and Community Services for the City of Bangor. I live in the town of Bowerbank in beautiful Piscataquis County and am here today to testify in favor of LD 1215, An Act To End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products.

Our kids deserve better than a lifetime of addiction.

I've spent my career working to give every child a fighting chance to live a healthy, hopeful and productive life. This has included the work of preventing tobacco use and nicotine among youth and young adults in Maine. Unfortunately, the tobacco industry is trying to do just the opposite.

The tobacco industry knows that if they don't hook our kids by age 21, there is only [a small chance](#) they will be able to do so. The industry also knows that the growing, developing brain is [extremely susceptible](#) to nicotine addiction. That's why they run billion-dollar marketing campaigns designed to make tobacco an appealing part of every youth culture, particularly young people already feeling "on the outside," [marginalized](#) from their peers.

It's a worst-case scenario for parents: Our children are the targets of an industry that profits from addiction — an industry that will do and say almost anything to increase sales and avoid regulation, even though their product is literally deadly.

I know what it's like from both angles. I'm a former smoker and I'm also the parent of seven children. I lived with the concern that my children might experiment with tobacco products, especially flavored products, and quickly find themselves addicted.

I want to remind the committee that this bill doesn't prohibit or criminalize nicotine or any other drug. What it does do is say to our kids that we care about them and their futures, and that means doing what it takes to PREVENT the chance that they'll use tobacco and become addicted to nicotine.

As a person in long-term recovery, I can say unequivocally that breaking free from my nicotine addiction was the most difficult.

Cotton Candy, Gummi Bear, Pop Tart and even Unicorn Puke. These are flavors from a candy store, meant to lure and hook kids. For every five kids who use tobacco, four of them [start with a flavored product](#). It's no surprise that tobacco use among Maine youth has been [skyrocketing](#).

Half of youth smokers [smoke menthols](#), which are easier to start with because menthol numbs the tongue and throat, masking the harsh taste of tobacco. I'm sure most of us could name a beloved family member or friend who started with menthol cigarettes and ended up with cancer, COPD, or heart disease. Too many died early as a result.

And now, almost [1 in 3](#) Maine high school students use e-cigarettes.

E-cigarettes are just one example of how the tobacco industry has adapted their products and their marketing tactics, often in cunning ways, to continue luring their "replacement smokers."

We can't stand by and let the tobacco industry hook another generation of Maine children. While federal policymakers ponder their options, Maine children are getting addicted to nicotine every day because of candy, fruit, mint, and menthol flavored tobacco products.

I'm proud of the leadership role that the city of Bangor has taken on this issue. Now it's time for Maine to lead the nation, as we often do.

Our children can't wait. I urge the Maine Legislature to take long overdue action to protect our kids by ending the sale of all flavored tobacco products. Together we can give the next generation a fair shot at a healthy and productive future, free from tobacco addiction.

Please vote 'yes' on LD 1215. Thank you and I'd be glad to answer any questions you may have.