

Testimony in Support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products”

Maine Legislature - Health & Human Services Committee

Tuesday April 25, 2023

Good afternoon Members of the Health & Human Services Committee, my name is Alexandria Gauthier and I live in Washburn where I work for the Aroostook Council on Healthy Families. I am here today in strong support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products”. As a public health worker in rural Maine who works with families and children aged 0-5, I fully support this legislation to redefine our state’s relationship with harmful flavored tobacco products. I have seen firsthand the devastating effects that these products can have on our communities

Flavored tobacco products, such as menthol cigarettes and fruit-flavored e-cigarettes, are often marketed towards young people, making them more likely to try them. Once they start using these highly concentrated products, it can be difficult for them to quit. This leads to a lifetime of chronic health problems such as severe lung damage (reduced lung function and structure) and cardiopulmonary issues (high blood pressure, increased arterial stiffness, reduced blood flow to the heart, weakened immune function) Teens who vape are more likely to begin smoking cigarettes. Nicotine addiction during teen years correlates with increased risk of subsequent addiction, depression, anxiety, and hyperactivity. Lung development continues into the early 20s, and adolescents who vape are at risk for stunting or altering their lung development such that they never reach their full lung function potential.

Not only are these products addictive, but they also pose serious health risks. Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, and flavored products are no exception. They have been linked to new health conditions unique to flavored tobacco. Emerging health literature demonstrates specific conditions only seen since the sale of flavored tobacco products. “Popcorn lung” is another name for bronchiolitis obliterans (BO), a rare condition that results from damage of the lungs’ small airways. The culprit is diacetyl, a food additive used to simulate butter flavor in microwave popcorn. Diacetyl is frequently added to flavored e-liquid to enhance the taste. Vaping-Related Lipoid Pneumonia, unlike the classic pneumonia caused by infection, lipoid pneumonia develops when fatty acids (the building blocks of fat) enter the lungs. Vaping-related lipoid pneumonia is the result of inhaling oily substances found in e-liquid, which sparks an inflammatory response in the lungs.

As someone who works with young children and families, I am particularly concerned about the impact that flavored tobacco products can have on developing brains. Accidental exposure to liquid from e-cigarettes has caused acute nicotine poisoning in children and adults. Some even require emergency department visits with nausea and vomiting being the most significant symptoms. As of March 31, poison centers nationally have managed 1,974 exposure cases about e-cigarette devices and liquid nicotine in 2023. A child or infant can not accidentally ingest a traditional cigarette (besides chewing it, even lighters have safety to ignite). Accidental

ingestion is limited by the mechanism of the device. For flavored tobacco products the devices have zero safety features. An infant (less than 12 months) has the physical capacity, (strength, mobility, range) to grasp and inhale an average e-cigarette device sold in stores. The sweet smell makes it more enticing whereas traditional cigarette smell was a deterrent for accidental ingestion. In child development we say “monkey see monkey do” it is very common for infants and toddlers to mimic the physical actions of caregivers, leading to accidental ingestion or hospitalization.

By passing this legislation, we can protect our community from the harmful effects of flavored tobacco products. We can ensure that our children are not targeted by Big Tobacco and that they have the opportunity to grow up healthy and free from addiction.

I urge our lawmakers to support this important public health measure and help us create a safe, healthy future for generations to come .