



April 25, 2023

Respectfully Submitted by:
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Re: LD 1215, An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products in Maine

On behalf of Rinck Advertising and a mother of two daughters in high school, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in favor to ban the sale of flavored tobacco products in Maine.

Rinck is the media contractor for the Maine CDC that provides mass-reach health communications and tobacco counter-marketing. It is estimated by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids that Big Tobacco spends over \$49.7 million¹ in Maine each year. This marketing has one goal: to hook new users. Big Tobacco is not replacing customers who quit, but rather those who die with a younger generation.

As marketers we often hear, “we don’t see tobacco marketing, so it must not be a problem”. This is because the ads are not meant for you, but it doesn’t mean it’s not happening. We cannot turn a blind eye.

New and emerging technologies allow marketing to deploy in a hidden, largely unregulated environment. Big Tobacco continues to target individuals, including our youth and most-at-risk, based on geographic, psychographic, and behavioral data. Utilizing offline behaviors and range of online activities, including browser searches, social media history, posts and comments, tobacco companies identify segments of the population with strong potential to become customers.

With over 20 years working in tobacco counter-marketing, I’ve seen first-hand the deceptive marketing strategies tobacco companies use to hook teens - and social media is one of the most prevalent.

While many social media platforms ban paid tobacco advertising, these restrictions don’t fully exist for influencer strategies. Influencers and brand ambassadors are used to promote businesses by collaborating with individuals who have strong social media following to increase brand exposure. Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, TikTok, and Twitter are just a few of the platforms where influencers continue to promote flavors and vaping as cool, glamorous and desirable.

Flavors have directly contributed to the rise and popularity of vaping among teens². In Maine, 4 out of 5 youth who try vaping start with a flavored product. E-cigarettes are often promoted as “reduced risk”, “smoke-free”, “socially acceptable” to attract youth. Last year, Puff Bar was the

¹ <https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/problem/toll-us/maine>

² Office of the U.S. Surgeon General. Surgeon General's Advisory on E-cigarette Use Among Youth. E-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov. <https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/surgeon-generals-advisory-on-e-cigarette-use-among-youth-2018.pdf> Accessed March 11, 2019.



most popular vaping device with more than half (51.3%) of the market share³. Why? Because Puff Bars are disposable and attractive to children and teenagers because of their vibrant colors and flavors, low cost, and ease of access.

Some notable key insights around flavors in our state are included in a recent statewide survey conducted in **last year** with 430 young adults 18-25 years of age through Market Decisions Research. This includes the following Maine insights:

- Young adults most often began vaping due to exposure from a friend (39%), attempting to quit other tobacco products (32%), or because vapes can be used discretely (34%).
- **63% of Maine tobacco users (18-25) indicate that they purchased flavored products (mint, fruit, etc.) in the past 30 days.**
- 1 out of 4 initially Maine young adults (18-25) tried e-cigarettes because they are available in flavors, such as mint, candy, fruit, or chocolate.
- Many respondents expressed concern for the pervasive impact of e-cigarettes on young people in Maine, with some saying they should be banned all together.

Removing flavors will help protect future generations from becoming addicted to the deadliest tobacco products. We have an important role to play in public health – and for the health of Maine. It is a role that means life and death for our younger generation. It's time to hold the tobacco industry accountable. They want to protect their profits. We need to protect our youth.

I urge you to take action to protect our youth by banning flavors.
You will save lives.

³ <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/emerging-tobacco-products/e-cigarettes-facts-stats-and-regulations#:~:text=Puff%20Bar%20was%20the%20most,e%2Dcigarettes'%20increasing%20popularity.>