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**Testimony for Portland Recovery Community Center by Leslie Clark, Executive Director
In Favor of LD 1215: An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products**

Committee on Health and Human Services
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
Re: LD 1215

April 24, 2023

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Leslie Clark. I am a person in long-term recovery and serve as the Executive Director of Portland Recovery Community Center (PRCC.) I am writing to you today in favor of LD 1215: An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products. The Board of the Portland Recovery Community Center has unanimously supported this legislation.

Portland Recovery Community Center is a recovery community organization. Our mission is to provide support, education and resources for people recovering from and affected by addiction and to spread the message of hope throughout the state of Maine. We serve as the recovery hub in Maine, building a statewide network of recovery community centers and supports. We are people in recovery, and we care about the issue of addiction. We know what it is like to be addicted to substances – and we know what it takes to recover. As a recovery community organization, we advocate to help Maine communities understand the science of addiction and dispel the misconception that there is any choice or freedom once becoming dependent on a substance. In fact, addiction is a chronic and progressive illness that robs an individual of personal choice and freedom.

PRCC supports the ban of flavored tobacco products as an important intervention for the prevention of youth access to these products, which are extremely addictive and set the stage for addiction to other drugs and substances. Nearly one in three Maine children are using tobacco products. Based on national studies, the overwhelming majority of tobacco use starts with flavored products. The tobacco industry has targeted our youth and vulnerable populations to create a market fed by addiction, just as the pharmaceutical industry marketed “safe narcotics” and created the opioid crisis.

A cornerstone of preventing addiction is preventing early use of tobacco products, because addiction as a brain disease develops early and evolves on a continuum. 75% of adults with a substance use disorder also have a history of cigarette smoking. That is why our organization is speaking out on this issue.

We recognize that many individuals in recovery use these flavored products and that not everyone agrees with this position. But this legislation is about our state's youth and preventing as many as possible from becoming addicted to a dangerous product. The tobacco industry has a long and lethal history of targeting Black Americans, marginalized youth and young adults, people with mental illness, LGBTQ+, people with low incomes, and other marginalized and vulnerable populations.

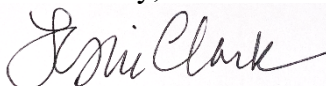
This legislation is not about prohibition; people will still be able to buy unflavored tobacco. Nor are these products about harm reduction. Flavored e-cigarettes do not help people free themselves of nicotine addiction; in fact, they are more addictive. You will hear some opponents say that people will be arrested for using flavored tobacco products. There are no criminal penalties proposed by this legislation for individuals or for shops that sell tobacco products.

We have the opportunity to give Maine youth and young adults a fair shot at a healthy and productive future, free from tobacco addiction. It's time to end the sale of flavored tobacco products. We urge you to prioritize the health, hope and productivity of Maine kids to live a life free from tobacco addiction and the increased potential for addiction to other substances.

At the heart of the recovery culture is a desire to give back and help others find freedom from addiction, offering the hope and example of our own experiences of recovery. Anyone who has watched a loved one suffer and die from addiction, whether it's from a heroin overdose or a slow and painful death by tobacco induced lung cancer or heart disease, knows that we would give anything to have prevented the ravages of addiction on our loved ones and our families.

Please help prevent and turn back the tide of destruction on young lives, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leslie M. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leslie M. Clark, MSW
Executive Director

Leslie Clark
Portland REcovery Community Center
LD 1215

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