

131st Maine Legislature
Health & Human Services Committee
Testimony of Dr. Norma Desjardins, DMD in Support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale
of Flavored Tobacco Products”
April 25, 2023

My name is Dr. Norma Desjardins and I am writing to members of the Legislature’s Health & Human Services Committee urging your support of LD 1215, “An Act to End the Sale of Flavored Tobacco Products”.

In my profession as a general dentist in private practice and currently as Director of St Apollonia Dental Clinic in Presque Isle, I see firsthand evidence of the deleterious effects of tobacco products on the oral health, and indeed the overall health, of our citizens. Patients who come to mind are a gentleman who had been a smoker and lost most of his lower jaw due to cancer, and as such his life was dramatically changed, becoming reclusive. Another is a woman who was diagnosed with oropharyngeal cancer most likely as a result of secondhand smoke exposure as she herself had never been a smoker. She had a radical neck dissection, lost nearly half of her tongue, could no longer work to her very great dismay, and as a survivor of now 15 years, she is still the primary cook for her family, but has not sat down to a meal with them since, as she is embarrassed that she cannot swallow regular food, so she eats her blended meals alone.

Opponents of LD 1215 may point to an economic argument against prohibiting flavored tobacco products and limiting the primary pathway Big Tobacco has to introduce and hook children to lifetimes of addiction. However, we have a responsibility to examine the long term cost across all Mainers, and to look at the type of economic impact that involves great loss to our society, premature loss of life and its cost to our communities, the burden of poor health of our families, youth, children now and far into the future as the cycle of nicotine addiction continues.

Society pays the bill for this problem. Treating electronic cigarette and vaping-related lung illnesses is expensive, just as lung cancer is expensive, in terms of medical care costs and in terms of lives lost. The American Lung Association has the data: “Lung cancer is the leading cancer killer in both men and women in the U.S. In 1987, it surpassed breast cancer to become the leading cause of cancer deaths in women.”

Supporting this bill means we want to be a State that strives to keep our youth healthy, sparing them easy access to toxic, harmful products. Let’s be a State that truly does walk the walk by promoting health, encouraging healthier choices and when possible, making unhealthy, poor choices less available to our citizens. Protecting the tobacco industry income does not compare to the cost of lost productivity in our workplaces and at home, loss of good health and indeed loss of lives in our communities.

Respectfully submitted,
Norma Desjardins DMD