

DD Allen
OTTO pizza
LD 1215

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Dd Allen, and I'm co-owner of OTTO's Pizza, which has more than 300 employees across several Maine locations. We are also a partner of the Tobacco-Free Maine Works business coalition. Between Taxes, rents, product, services and payroll, OTTO contributes over \$20M into the Maine economy each year. We pride ourselves on selling products and operating our business in a way that not only contributes to the economy, but also supports the long term health and well-being of communities.

I'm testifying in favor of LD 1215 because reducing youth tobacco use is key to promoting healthy communities where businesses like mine can succeed.

Like other businesses, maintaining reliable staff across our locations is a top priority and a challenge for OTTOS. Tobacco use among employees makes that even harder because they tend to be less healthy and call out sick more often. Having staff outside the entryways smoking or smelling of smoke when they interact with customers also doesn't fit with OTTO's values as a community and family oriented brand.

This problem isn't unique to Otto; it cuts across the food service industry, childcare businesses, construction, and more. According to the Maine CDC, smoking costs the state nearly \$1.5 billion a year in associated health care costs and lost productivity. Tobacco addiction is a scourge on peoples' health, and its consequences present one more challenge to employers who are working hard to build their businesses.

We need to get current tobacco users the resources and support they need to quit. But we also need to address the root of the problem—most tobacco users start young. 1 in 5 Maine high schoolers are currently using a tobacco product, and young people overwhelmingly start with flavored products. Ending the sale of flavored tobacco products like cherry e-cigarettes, Rocky Road flavored cigars and menthol cigarettes will make tobacco less appealing to kids and reduce youth use.

This isn't just a business issue for me, it's also personal. All three of my children tried flavored tobacco for the first time as teenagers. Several years later, all three of them still struggle with tobacco addiction, despite several attempts at quitting. If we can do something to keep kids from ever starting to use these highly addictive products, let's do it.

I urge this committee, for our businesses, our families, and our young people, please vote yes on LD 1215 to end the sale of all flavored tobacco products.

Dd Allen
OTTO Pizza